The Synergistic Relationship between Painting and Poetry in Derek Walcott

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Philosophy

In

English (Literary Studies)

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

November 2010


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Abstract of thesis entitled:

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Abstract

The Nobel Prize winning West Indian poet and dramatist Derek Walcott is one of the world's most celebrated writers nowadays. His thorough education in European literary and art traditions, combined with his hybrid identity as a result of the cultural/political context of the Caribbean region, have bestowed upon him rich literary resources, with which he has developed his unique poetics and literary strategy. The scope and depth of Walcott's works, especially his demanding poems, are often created through the writer's heavy references to paintings and painters in European art history, thus posing great challenges to their readers. An amateur painter himself, Walcott engages the visual art in his own verbal art in ways that exceed the usual definition of intertextuality, with the two art forms crossing into each other, blurring the boundary between poetic form and its subject matter, and arriving at a type of synergistic relationship. Synergies as such take various forms in Walcott's poems, from direct or implicit allusions to well-known paintings/painters, to poems with marked painterly qualities, or poems about specific painting techniques or ekphrastic poems, and sometimes even to the juxtaposition of actual paintings alongside poetic lines. While critics regard Walcott's employment of the visual-verbal synergy as a recognized fact, they differ in their understanding of its significance to the poet's literary project, attributing it mainly to either his literary aspiration to the metropolitan literary tradition, or to his cultural/political responsibility as a Caribbean writer. This study, however, proposes a more synthetic view of Walcott's two "separate" goals and their connection to the poet's frequent engagement with visual art. Focusing on detailed readings of some of Walcott's major poetry works in which the visual art figures prominently, and examining them alongside other primary sources such as the poet's important essays and interviews, this study seeks to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the poet's visual-verbal synergy and its significance to his literary project.

摘要

聖露西亞著名詩人兼劇作家，諾貝爾文學獎獲得者德裡克·沃爾科特是當代英文文壇最有影響力的人物之一。他從小接受正統的英語文學教育，同時亦對歐洲藝術史有著廣泛且深入的瞭解，並多年來在撰寫詩歌和戲劇之外，進行油畫及水彩創作。在這樣的影響下，沃爾科特的作品，尤其是詩作，以其豐富的意象，多變的形式，以及深厚的文學藝術底蘊著稱。沃爾科特的詩歌常常涉及各種繪畫——尤其是西方美術史上的名作。然而繪畫作品在他的詩歌中通常不僅僅作為被描寫的內容出現，而是超越一般的“形式——內容”的關係，在多個層面上與文字發生協同作用。這種視覺元素和文字的協同作用跨越了這兩個原本互不相通的符號系統，淡化了它們之間的界限，使沃爾科特詩歌中對繪畫元素的引用超出了一般“互文性”的範疇。雖然不少文學批評家都認識到沃爾科特詩歌的這一顯著特點，但是他們對於這一特點以及其意義的理解卻不盡相同。現行的主要觀點一般將沃爾科特詩歌中對繪畫元素的使用歸因於兩個主要動機之一：其一，它是詩人作為文化精英，對圣露西亞（以及整個加勒比海地區）殖民歷史及其文化衝擊的回應手段；其二，它通過使用西方文化中通行的符號，有助於詩人實現其自身文學地位的建立與鞏固。上述兩個動機分別是詩人的文化責任和其個人目標的體現，它們之間的矛盾和衝突亦是沃爾科特等第三世界國家詩人必須面對的普遍問題。本文認為，沃爾科特的獨特之處正在於其對這兩個相互衝突的動機的處理——通過對西方繪畫元素的使用，沃爾科特在其詩作中巧妙地將原本矛盾的兩個動機合二為一，并通過對繪畫，畫家，以及繪畫技巧的深入討論，找到了處理這兩個動機（目標）的手段。而這正是沃爾科特在詩作中廣泛涉及繪畫元素，運用繪畫——文字協同作用的根本原因。

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INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to examine the relationship between two different forms of art—painting and poetry—in the creative output of Derek Walcott. A poet and a playwright, the 1992 Nobel Laureate (in Literature) was in intimate connection with western art tradition early in his childhood as he was educated in the English language and European literary tradition. Born into a middle class, Methodist family, painting has always been a significant part of Walcott's education, art, and life. His father Warwick Walcott was a civil servant and an amateur painter. And although he died when his son was only one year old, he left him with a library full of great names in western art tradition, among which there were Cézanne, Gauguin, and van Gogh. Walcott attended St. Mary's College in Castries, the capital of his country St. Lucia, and his mentor, Harold Simmons, was also a painter, (Mjöberg; King). And although now celebrated world-wide as primarily a poet and a playwright, painting remains a considerable part of his artistic output, and paintings and their painters are close to the centre of his poetic vision.

His erudite knowledge of the European art tradition, combined with his understanding of both the visual and verbal arts formed through years of practice, apart from establishing him as one of the most preeminent poets nowadays, have also given his poetry in general a profound depth and density. Walcott himself freely admits the difficulties of approaching his works. In an interview with

freelance journalist Simon Stanford on 28th April 2005[1], while asked if he thought his works were accessible, Walcott immediately replied: "No it's not accessible at all! In fact it's far from accessible" [*my transcription*] (Stanford, 24:24). Yet having said that, he left his poetry out of the frame by quickly shifting the focus to the reception of his theatrical works in Broadway, and he partly explained away the "inaccessibility" by pointing to Broadway producers' lack of interest in the subjects of his plays: "They don't care about the life of a black fishermen—if that's what I'm writing about—or the life of an Indian woman living in the country…because these are not box office subjects" (Stanford, 24:35). Purposefully or not, Walcott left his poetry out of the frame, yet this move almost inevitably pushes one to think even more of his poetry—because it is always his poetry, much more so than his plays, that has been difficult to access, if not "not accessible at all". Besides, Walcott's explanation about the "non-box-office" subjects of his plays also easily brings one to think about the major subject matters of his poetry which are heavily informed by the European literary and art tradition, which in contrast to his plays, have brought him world-wide recognition and fame.

While Walcott's poetry frequently engages visual art, it takes as its proper subjects not only paintings or painters themselves, but also various other aspects related to them, such as the life story of a painter or the stories behind a painting,

[1] The Simon Stanford interview is a featured interview on The Official Web Site of the Nobel Prize (http://nobelprize.org). The fairly comprehensive interview covers many important issues about Walcott's life and work, such as his understanding of his origins, his intended audience for his poetry and drama, his cultural influences, his major poetic inspiration and achievements, etc. For more details, see http://nobelprize.org/mediaplayer/index.php?id=688.

the techniques involved in a painting or characteristic of a painter, as well as the genealogy of different schools in European art tradition or traces of influences/innovation among painters. Walcott's poetry thus engages elements of the visual art on multiple levels and frequently crosses the boundary between form and subject matter, with poems often written to resemble paintings or speaking through the persona of certain painters. A few quick examples may help illustrate this point. The poem "Gauguin" in *Midsummer*, for example, is written as an imagined monologue by Gauguin himself, in which he expresses his separation from the metropolis and his recognition of his mixed identity. Walcott in this case connects himself to and speaks through the persona of Gauguin. In the case where a painting extends into the verbal form of the work, the poem often becomes ekphrastic, i.e. a verbal re-rendering of the painting. "The Polish Rider" is of this type, as it is an ekphrastic poem which re-renders into words the 1655 painting *The Polish Rider* by Rembrandt. The last case in which a poem comes to resemble a painting is often the least discernable, and its distinction from a normal poem with rich imagery is often vague and hard to decide. In fact it would be problematic to force a clear distinction line between this "type" of poem and the "normal' ones. But if one must highlight its special characteristics, I think it is reasonable to understand it as similar to the poems of imagism, in the sense that the poem, or parts of it, exists mainly as a cluster of images without clear verbal, syntactical or grammatical indication of their interrelationships, as in the case of Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro".

Such a poem resembles a painting in the way that: 1) it appears to the reader, as a painting appears to its viewer, as an assortment of pure images/details; and 2) the reader's reading experience, as a result, resembles the experience of viewing a painting.

Poem IV in *Midsummer*, for example, opens with five lines of almost pure noun phrases depicting the scene of a Spanish port, with a strong sense of stasis caused by the almost total lack of narrative link between the assortment of images/details:

> This Spanish port, piratical in diverseness,
> with its one-eyed lighthouse, this damned sea of noise,
> this ocher harbor, mantled by its own scum,
> offers, from white wrought-iron balconies,
> the nineteenth-century view. (IV, *Midsummer*)

The "lighthouse", "sea", "scum", and "balconies" (presumably also houses by the port) are details converging under the general term "Spanish port" or "habor", and yet remain only attachments dangling from the main structure of the sentence "This Spanish port offers the nineteenth-century view." The verb "offers" transforms the random assortment of fragmented images into a grammatically complete sentence. Yet the sense of completeness and the flow of the sentence are severely frustrated by the frequent insertions of random images. Reading these lines from the beginning to the end, the reader experiences first of all a general image of a "Spanish port", and then dives immediately into the minute details—the lighthouse, the sea, the balconies, etc, which are in turn further accompanied by more secondary, associative images/qualities—such as

"piratical", "one-eyed", "damned", "mantled", etc. Finally, with the completion of the sentence, all these details are wrapped up again in the last two lines into an overall and more informed impression of the "Spanish port" as exhibiting a "Nineteenth-century view". This reading experience is very similar to viewing a painting in which the viewer, upon first seeing the work, first recognizes its major subject, then proceeds into closer examination of its various details here and there; and finally arrives at a more informed and complete impression of the work as a whole. Further, due to the loose syntax of the lines, the image fragments are almost interchangeable in terms of their placement in the lines. Thus although the poet has streamed the images/details into such an order/sequence as given on the page, and thereby specifies an order in which these details should appear to the reader, it is still obvious that these images actually co-exist as spatial parallels, similar to the different sections of a painting. Such poems, therefore similar to some ekphrastic poems, force the reading experience to resemble the visual scanning of a painting.

As "Poem IV" demonstrates, Walcott's poetry frequently contains rich images dangling from a loose syntax. The readers working with the poems may first be struck by a rich array of fresh images, yet may not immediately recognize the logic and connections between the images. In his essay "Walcott, Poet and Painter", T. J. Cribb has written extensively on the similarities between Walcott's poetic and artistic works. Proceeding from studying a painting by Walcott in his own collection, and finding a way into the "defining

characteristics of Walcott's poetry", he identifies two major reactions, balancing with each other, which Walcott's painting often evokes in the viewer: in the first case, the viewer recognizes the subject matter of the work upon seeing it; in the other, the form of the painting—"indeterminate shapes and colours that resolve into an identifiable subject only after an interval of time" (Cribb, 176). Walcott's poetry often evokes similar experiences. Often the meaning of the poem must be worked out by carefully tracing the images down by linking one image to another, or sometimes several others which yield different meanings. Further, images may lead and connect to one another often in various ways: through semantic or grammatical relations, through metrical relations such as rhymes, through rhetorical devices such as puns or metaphors, or sometimes through stylistic or typographical positions, such as juxtaposition or specific arrangement of lines. The experience of reading Walcott's poetry, therefore, could sometimes resemble that of appreciating a work of visual art, where the impact of initial experience of the patches of colours, running lines, as well as the immediate emotions suggested by them usually comes prior to achieving the semantic grasp of the work.

Further, it is worth noticing that such tendencies towards a painterly quality exist not only in individual poems by Walcott, but may also be found on even larger scales. For example, in a similar manner but on the scale of the entire volume, the collection *Midsummer*, resembles a painting on the whole. Compared with Walcott's other book-length poems such as *Another Life* (1973),

The Fortunate Traveller (1981) or *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000), *Midsummer* has a much less consistent narrative over its collection of more than fifty individual poems, and thus looks more like a scrapbook of different scenes and reflections, or perhaps a travel log with discontinuous entries. Critics like Robert Benson or Rei Terada have noted that: *Midsummer*'s "relative plotlessness and casual arrangements of detail make it resemble still life" (Terada 1992, 143). This observation is certainly not suggesting that one may argue for a general painterly quality over every book by Walcott, although it does bring home the recognition that Walcott's schooling in European art and literary traditions has the visual art finding its way onto various levels of his poetic creations.

In his book *Tiepolo's Hound*, painting and poetry are brought together in yet another significant way, as we shall examine later. For the moment it suffices to just note that, in this book Walcott has placed twenty-six paintings of his own alongside his poetic texts, and has arranged them in such a way that they form an integral part of the volume. Peter Erikson, in his discussion of the role of visual art in Walcott's poetic discourse, regards this design as "an unprecedented elevation of the visual component of Walcott's work" (Erikson, 224). Indeed, *Tiepolo's Hound* is so deeply informed by Walcott's extensive knowledge of the life and works of the French painter Camille Pissarro, among other names (such as Gauguin), that it is almost unreadable for readers without such knowledge. Besides, the poem would be much less comprehensible should readers fail to "read" the paintings alongside the lines. And although Erikson, perhaps for the

sake of forming a sharper contrast, has been too quick to downplay the importance of paintings in Walcott's other works as merely "jacket covers for individual volumes" with "an exclusively decorative function" (Erikson, 224-5), his view on the importance of visual art in *Tiepolo's Hound* hits upon the fact, almost prophetically, that painting—and painters as well—had never before been placed at the centre of Walcott's poetry in such proportion and on such a scale, nor have they ever been since, i.e. at least till the present moment of this thesis. With the publication of Walcott's latest books following *Tiepolo's Hound*: especially *The Prodigal* (2004) and *White Egrets* (2010), critics and book reviewers have invariably noticed, despite other long-time continuities between Walcott's works in terms of themes, motifs or tropes, subtle but significant changes in the poet's vision (about himself and his own works) and the underlying mood of the poems (see Morrison; Kirsch; Payne; Kellaway)[2]. As I will argue later, this might not be so much a discontinuity as it might be a further—and possibly final—development of Walcott's poetic vision and project. But still, it is worth noticing that the visual art—paintings as well as painters—figure less prominently in these latest works.

As shown in my account of the major forms of painting-poetry interaction in Walcott, the verbal and the visual often engage each other on multiple levels

[2] Blake Morrison notes that "*The Prodigal* lacks that kind of narrative pull and energy [of *Omeros*]" and that "its shape isn't the arc of journey [like in *The Fortunate Traveller*, *Tiepolo's Hound* or even *Midsummer*] but comes from the drift of the poet's mind." Adam Kirsch comments that "*The Prodigal* is like the last movement of a symphony in which all the earlier themes [from previous works] return, transformed by memory and tinged with melancholy." Tom Payne reads *White Egrets* as a collection about "forgetfulness", a "volume of confessional poetry" which "isn't going into specifics" but is "letting things go—guilt, grudges and, if need be, even poetry itself." Kate Kellaway further notes that *White Egrets* conveys a sense that "it has been written by a grand old man of the sea", and that Walcott seems to be "writing his own valediction."

of interpenetration, maintaining a relationship far more complex and subtler than we might usually assume from associating the two. Such a relationship between poetry and the visual art in general, I think, can be aptly summarized with the term "synergy", which emphasizes not only the fact that both forms of art function with and through each other in Walcott's works, but also that they exist in his poetry in a kind of mutual dependence (interpenetration).

Given the size, scope and depth of Walcott's literary output, it is no doubt beyond the scope of the present study to document and account for every aspect of its painting-poetry synergy. Besides, the recognition of this highly distinctive characteristic of Walcott's art inevitably urges a series of follow-up questions such as: How does our knowledge of the painting-poetry synergy help us better understand Walcott's poems, his poetics, and his literary project on the whole? Why cross poetry with painting instead of other art forms such as, say, music? Or simply: Why should Walcott want to, or perhaps need to, create all these complexities in the first place? Such enquires go beyond the painting-poetry synergy itself, and seek to comprehend it in its connections with more fundamental aspects of the poet's literary vision, scope, and endeavour. Therefore, perhaps it would not be too useful should this study attempt, as if just for variety's sake, an all-inclusive, indiscriminative documentation of as many instances of Walcott's painting-poetry crossings as possible. Instead, I propose to conduct a more selective and focused study on a few major ways in which the two art forms interact with each other, maintaining at the same time a keen

awareness of the textual, personal, and cultural contexts in which such synergies take effect. With this approach, hopefully, it will form a clearer view or some deeper understanding about how this synergistic relationship between the visual and the verbal is informed by some of the larger, more fundamental concerns in Walcott's poetic vision, as well as what its major impact on his literary project has been.

By thus defining the boundary and trajectory of my study, I intent to highlight my basic working logic—Walcott's highly idiosyncratic and creative employment of the visual art in his poetry, more than just the result of his family influence and his education in the European traditions, is deeply rooted in a complex of personal, cultural and political issues facing his writing career. To a great extent, the aesthetics and the politics[3] of Walcott's poetry bear upon each other. The subject matters he has chosen to work on, as well as the styles he has experimented with, are his writer's ways of responding to both the challenges posed by those personal/cultural/political issues, and the conflicts/anxieties as caused by them within his own identity or between his (perceptions of) his identity, his duties, and his aspirations as a writer.

Among contemporary Caribbean authors, Walcott is perhaps the one most aptly characterized by a haunting sense of "betweenness", which seems to frequently assert its presence in the studies of the poet and his art by constantly

[3] I use "politics" in its much more general sense—similar to its meanings in the post-colonial contexts—as the dynamics between complex issues of competing interests pertaining to not only the "political" (in the narrow sense of the word), but also the personal, cultural, and literary situations which confront Walcott, shaping and in turn being shaped by his works.

drawing both into the centre of various opposing forces. Among the many recognized candidates to sit on both sides of this "betweenness", there are large scale, generalizing terms such as the "West" and the "Caribbean", the "Old world" and the "New world", the "colonizer" and the "colonized"; or smaller-scaled, more finely defined (and therefore more concrete) concepts such as the English literary/art tradition (education) and the Caribbean heritages (inheritance), the English language and the Creole, as well as painting and poetry. Rei Terada, agreeing with critics like James Dickey and Helen Vendler, makes the observation that Walcott "situates himself 'between' the various oppositions" (Terada 1992, 8). It is often somewhere between these pairs of concepts, these "oppositions", and within the critical contexts they prescribe that Walcott and his art are examined by critics.

Yet the broadness of Walcott's literary scope and the complexity it harbours cannot be adequately characterized and understood by this rather vague notion of "betweenness". For Walcott, as Terada continues to comment, "betweenness is not a solution, but an arduous problem" (Terada 1992, 8). The position of being caught between is not staying in a comfortable zone that isolates the poet from the various conflicting forces, connections, allegiances or demands, but where all these strings intertwine, and under whose strain the poet must constantly make responses and choices. Walcott is often brought to choose between the conflicting sides—or at least he often presents himself as facing choices. "A Far Cry from Africa" (1962), one of Walcott's most famous and

frequently studied early poems, dramatizes not only this imperative to choose, but also, and most impressively, the difficulty of choice, with an agonizing burst of questions:

> I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
> Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
> I who have cursed
> The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
> Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
> Betray them both, or give back what they give?
> How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
> How can I turn from Africa and live? (ln. 26-33)

It is important to note that the series of questions of choice proceed from the premise that the poet/speaker recognizes himself and his cultural heritages as the primary reason for the division and hence the choices. The division is in "the blood", "the vein". The poet's hybrid identity—one which takes after the English, the Dutch, and the African, and is enacted through mixing Standard English with Creole in the lines—is what ultimately compels the choice. But although the source for the imperative to choose is recognized, the difficulty of choice remains unresolved while the poem ends with the question mark—and rightly so, since the hybridity of identity is not something to be resolved. Nor are the connections between different heritages within it any more separable than their divisions are collapsible. The "betweenness" is not so much a cultural position which Walcott occupies as it is a way of conceptualizing his hybrid identity—a "state of being" as Terada calls it—which is "neither a synthesis nor

a separation, but [one] that incorporates differences within itself." (Terada 1992, 9)

Another important and revealing thing to notice about "A Far Cry from Africa" is its mood. The stark scene of the massacre during the Mau Mau Uprising in the beginning sets the basic tone of the poem, which is echoed and summed up by the agonizing and unsolvable questions about divided loyalties in the end. Walcott is often very candid with his concerns or desires, and readily acknowledges them in his poems. But his difficult style has often made such confessions hard to perceive on the immediate level. Perhaps part of the reason that "A Far Cry from Africa" has attracted so much critical attention is that, compared to many other poems hidden beneath the more densely layered images and references, this one is especially straightforward in expressing its concerns, doubts and pains. The urge to make choices between equally impossible alternatives and the indefinite delay of decision-making cause pains that refuse to be alleviated by the recognition that the poet "contains" the conflicts in his own identity instead of being caught "between" them (Terada 1992, 9). The painful doubts and unsolvable "problem" of identity dramatized in "A Far Cry from Africa" reveals a mentality somewhat different from some common impression of Walcott's poetic demeanour as appropriate to his established literary stature. Victor Chang, in his survey of the development of Caribbean literature for *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*, views Walcott as one of the two "giant figures" in the literary "landscape of the 1960s" (the other

being Kamau Brathwaite), and as embodying an "intellectual toughness" with an "immense knowledge of English and European traditions" while at the same time "allied with a strong sense of place and identity" (Chang, 243). Similarly, Mervyn Morris, in an introduction to Walcott for *West Indian Literature* (ed. Bruce King), readily writes that "Derek Walcott has always, in theory and in practice, been willing to draw on the total heritage available to him as an alert and enquiring human being." (Morris, 144) In these comments, words like "toughness" or "willing[ness]" could be misleading and certainly need more clarification because they tend to mask the anxiety underlying Walcott's employment of his diverse cultural inheritance for his literary project. It is true, as Morris has said, that "[a]lthough so much of [Walcott's] own writing explores and dramatises divisions within himself, the thrust is usually towards reconciliation, acceptance, compassion" (Morris, 146), but this certainly is not the same as saying the divisions within the identity readily provide easy ways of reconciliation, acceptance, or compassion. On the contrary, Morris's observation, by noticing the ongoing nature of the poet's striving for these "solutions", suggests that they are never easy (perhaps even impossible) to reach. Terada also notices the pain attached to the poet/speaker's questions while commenting on the same lines from "A Far Cry from Africa" quoted above—"The [poem] tend[s] not to lead one to believe that a problem's insolubility vanquishes the problem, for the inevitability of the poet's position does not make it any less agonizing" (Terada 1992, 9). In the same logic, it is important to add that, being able to

recognize and contain all the cultural connections and divisions as inherent to the hybrid identity does not necessarily alleviate the pain or anxiety associated with finding ways to resolve the tensions within such an identity—although as we shall see later, Walcott has come to make use of it to his own advantage. In any case, Walcott is among the group of authors whose works shaped and signaled the coming of age of West Indian literature in the mid-20th century. And considering the "complexities and ambiguities that lie at the heart of the Western Indian experience" (Chang, 242) in the cultural, social, political, and literary milieu of the West Indies at that period, it is reasonable to say that the general intellectual tide, with the "increasing maturity of vision", was certainly turning from the earlier sense of pride and naïve celebration of Africa to a later, more sober and more "realistic appraisal of what society and the land mean" (Chang, 240-1). In this context of West Indian elites' process of gradual self-recognition in the mid 20th century, the inevitable doubts and anxieties arising from a maturing understanding of one's identity could be justifiably assumed and better made sense of.

In other words, at least for Walcott, the central issue is not about being "at rest" or being reconciled with hybridity, but more a case of having to live and work with the tensions which are caused by, arising from , and in a sense sustaining, such hybridity. Walcott, who published his first collection of poems in 1948—more than a decade before the circle of professional writers could have evolved—and had since been working towards literary professionalism before

the "clear sense of direction charted" (Chang, 243) was in the air, could not have remained ignorant or immune to some of those shared fundamental anxieties. Rhonda Cobham notes that, "[p]art of the early popularity and influence of Walcott's work in West Indian literary circles must certainly have been due to the fact that so many educated West Indians identified with the *struggle* between opposing cultural influences which was from the start a major theme in his plays and poetry." (Cobham, 19) [italics mine]. Cobham's comment makes two major points about Walcott's work: 1) the "struggle"—and presumably doubts and anxieties arising with it—as the result of hybrid identities was a shared concern among West Indian authors; and 2) such a concern/struggle/anxiety has largely informed Walcott's works.

But tracing the primary source of this anxiety back to a hybrid identity, though helpful, does not finally answer the following questions: What exactly constituted this anxiety? What else, besides or together with Walcott's hybridity, caused it? In what manner has it shaped Walcott's literary practice? As such anxiety is what has been underlying Walcott's creative energy, which his literary strategies respond to and cope with, a more thorough understanding of it may provide the guideline and yardstick by which his literary project could be better appreciated. Thus in Chapter I of this study, my first task is to approach and explore the range of this haunting anxiety, and try to map out the key issues involved in it. I suggest that while Walcott's own literary stature grows and changes from the earlier third-world poet to the later international (and in a

sense metropolitan) poet and then the Nobel laureate, the fundamental anxiety maintains its presence but undergoes significant transformations as well. Inspired by Jeffrey Gray's idea of the "burden of representation" in his essay "Walcott's Traveler and the Problem of Witness", I argue that the fundamental anxiety of Walcott, especially during the earlier stage of his literary career, has been the result of his hybrid identity and his felt divided cultural allegiance. And while this anxiety maintains a weighty presence on the later half of his ascending literary career and growing critical reception, it is balanced and transformed by his literary aspiration as a celebrated writer. Walcott's ultimate literary goal, I believe, is again rooted in his hybrid identity, but transcends the heavily political scope of the role as a post-colonial spokesman for the colonized people which has been so commonly and (too) readily assumed by third world writers. As critics like Patrick Colm Hogan have argued, Walcott ultimately aims to "take on the metropolitan tradition and establish himself as achieving feats comparable, not to those of writers who are good in the tradition...but to those figures who define the entire tradition." (Hogan, 163) Such an aspiration complicates the issue of Walcott's self-placement by adding another dimension to the already complicated relationship between the poet and his people, forcing him to constantly re-negotiate, through his works, his position in that relationship, as well as balance between his role as a Caribbean poet and as the internationally acclaimed, metropolitan, Nobel Prize laureate.

Yet in practice the relationship between Walcott's literary aspiration and his

"burden" (to borrow Gray's term) is more complicated and entangled than could ever be neatly separated or summarized. Similarly, the aesthetics and politics of his poetics are also intricately interwoven—and understandably so, especially when we recognize the fact that no matter how much effort Walcott puts into aligning himself and calibrating his craft with the figures and works in the Western literary canon, he still needs to come to terms with his complex cultural identity, which is what the metropolitan writers might be happily exempted from. Thus the question of strategy has always remained present and urgent to Walcott, and to his critics as well. In this study I argue that by strategically exploring in his works the synergistic relationship between painting and poetry—and more generally between the visual and the verbal texts—Walcott enables himself to address his literary aspiration and aesthetic concerns on the one hand, and his burden/duties of representing his people on the other.

Chapter II focuses mainly on how Walcott's poetic meditation through the paintings, painters, and visual art help mediate his poetic meditation/discussions on the crucial issue of representation. I argue that while burdened by the responsibility of representing his people, Walcott does not confront the issue directly, but instead seeks to undermine its theoretical foundation by conducting his poetic discussions on the nature of representation, and pointing out that representation itself is a porous and highly problematic process. Thus he enables himself to, in a sense, shift his burden of representation and redirect his poetic energy, preparing the theoretical basis for his literary project.

Chapter III builds on the foundations established in Chapter I and II, and discusses the various ways in which Walcott works through and against representation, in order to fulfill his literary tasks. This long chapter carries the heavy task of examining Walcott's treatment of both his perceived literary responsibility to the Caribbean and his marked metropolitan tendencies. The subtlety of Walcott's strategy means that it is extremely difficult to make a clear distinction between his intricately related public and personal literary goals, thus ruling out the option to discuss these two aspects in separate chapters. In this chapter I will analyze how Walcott explores the political value of the visual-verbal synergy—especially the trope of ekphrasis—in order to handle his "burden of representation"—first by bearing witness to the misrepresentation of the Caribbean; and then by working through and against such misrepresentations with his own version of more enlightened "misrepresentation", thus turning the problematic nature of representation into an empowering feature. On the other hand, through his creatively mediated representative/ekphrastic poems, Walcott also enables himself to address his literary aspiration.

And finally, as I have suggested, Walcott's two major concerns are in fact more intricately related and intertwined than the structure of this study may have suggested. And although Walcott's strategic deployment of the visual-verbal crossings helps him deal with both his aspiration and his burdens, this does not necessarily mean that he is ever able to finish both tasks in one go. This entire endeavour is a slow, painstaking, piecemeal, and undoubtedly frequently

repeated process[4]—as much so for the early Caribbean Walcott as for the later metropolitan Nobel laureate.

[4] This in a sense Sisyphean project may also partly explain why Walcott seems to frequently repeat himself in terms of themes, images, metaphors, etc. But again, as we shall see, it is not at all Sisyphean in the sense that the very futility of trying to reconcile a conflicted identity has become itself a highly valuable and treatable theme.

CHAPTER I
HYBRIDITY, RESPONSIBILITY, AND ASPIRATION: WALCOTT'S MULTIPLE ANXIETIES

In the previous chapter I have suggested that there has always been in Walcott a sense of anxiety which is deeply rooted in the personal, cultural and political situations in which he writes. Moreover, informed by Rei Terada and Mervyn Morris in my brief reading of "A Far Cry from Africa", I suggested that this anxiety, presenting itself since his early works, was ultimately the result of Walcott's hybrid identity and his conflicting cultural allegiances—which were most impressively dramatized in this poem. This chapter will follow this line of thought, and examine in more detail the key issues involved in Walcott's hybridity, and try to understand in what ways have these issues contributed to that anxiety.

As I mentioned, Walcott seems best characterized by a prevailing sense of "betweenness" which manifests itself in almost every aspect of the writer's life and work. But what should be noted about such a "betweenness" is that, it is often not so much a status really "in between" different or sometimes opposing ends[5], as it is a status of being "divided between" them. For examnple, take his cultural inheritance as an example: I think it is more accurate to say that Walcott is *both* European and Caribbean—i.e. divided between them, rather than saying he is neither but somewhere in between. Sounding more paradoxical than it is, I think this status of being divided between cultures denotes not so much the split

[5] A brief survey of the ideas frequently associated with Walcott's "betweenness" is given on page 9 of the Introduction.

in Walcott as it emphasizes the synthesis of different heritages in the poet.

But again synthesis does not necessarily mean that Walcott comfortably contains these divisions, nor does it promise any advantages immediately usable to the poet at first. On the contrary this hybridity has been a state of being whose existence and significance Walcott has to comprehend and constantly come to term with. Further, throughout the years, and with the changes of his literary status from the early third-world poet/dramatist to the later metropolitan, international, Nobel laureate, he has also developed different understandings of what this hybridity is, and what it means to his life and career.

Since the very beginning, Walcott's mixed cultural inheritance has not brought him closer to either of his origins but instead a strong sense of alienation from not only the Europe he read about and saw in the paintings, but also from the people around him on his Caribbean island. Born into a middle-class, English-speaking, Methodist family whose origin mixes the English, Dutch, and African, and educated almost entirely in European art and literary traditions, Walcott is among the absolute minority on the island of St. Lucia, whose population is predominantly of African descent, Roman Catholic, and French-Creole-speaking. He recalls, in one of his few longer essays "What the Twilight Says" (1970), the strong sense of alienation he experienced in childhood while watching a religious recruiting patrol by local black people—some twenty years before he wrote "A Far Cry from Africa". The parade, as Walcott vividly remembers, was boisterous, joyful, and radiant with

strong native beats. It was so absorbing that it had kept him and his brother up from bed, and from their upstairs window watching—yet only watching:

> A gas lamp startles the sidewalk, and catches like fire-edged coals the black faces of men in white, martial uniform, dilating the dun goatskin of the big bass drum, throwing its tireless radiance as far as our balcony across the street, changing the crossroad of Mary Ann Street and the Chaussée to a stage crossed by shadows. …an unheard army singing in the pebbled back yards, in the jalousied upstairs bedrooms whose moonlit linen would have to wait. … Yet, like the long, applauded note, joy soared farther from two pale children staring from their upstairs window, wanting to march with that ragged, barefooted crowd, but who could not because they were not black and poor…(Walcott, *WTS*, 19-20)

The sharp sense of alienation and distance is remembered through a series of sharp contrasts in colour, texture, and location: the "black faces" as opposed to "pale children"; "shadows" cast by the performers as opposed to white "moonlit linen"; the "dun goatskin" of the drum as opposed to, again, the "moonlit linen"; and the "crossroad" where people meet and participate in the parade, as opposed to the distant "balcony" and the "upstairs window" where young Derek and Roderick watched the show.

Another remarkable feature of the quoted passage is that Walcott has used third person pronoun to refer to his early childhood self. In fact throughout "What the Twilight Says", he has been constantly shifting among all the three positions of the singular pronoun while referring to himself. One possible explanation for such moves, I think, is that Walcott is trying to distance his

subject self—the one who is currently writing, recollecting reflecting and consciously choosing pronouns—from his other, earlier selves—those who are being written, recollected and reflected upon in this essay which is something of an intellectual autobiography of the writer. Accordingly, his attitudes towards his earlier selves vary from sympathetic to critical or sometimes confessional. Recalling his mixed feeling in childhood upon observing that religious parade and being struck by that alienating difference between himself and the majority of his people, he writes:

> [O]ne of [the two boys], watching the shouting, limber congregation, that difference became a sadness, that sadness rage, and that longing to share their lives ambition, so that at least one convert was made. They were the shadows of his first theatre…(Walcott, *WTS*, 19-20)

It seems that Walcott is here trying to pinpoint a defining moment in his life, one that supposedly has become his very first initiation into a life-long commitment to writing plays and poetry. However, there is also a sense of irony in these lines, and especially in the idea of "conversion". If it is still reasonable for us to believe that young Walcott, following the tides of strong emotions (sadness, rage, longing, etc.), made the resolution to "share their lives", the idea of being successfully converted[6] must sound too naïve and idealistic. To put it in a simpler way, "convert" seems too big a word for that "pale" child watching the black parade from his "upstairs window" and wanting to "share their joy". The "conversion", if any at all, is synonymous with "ambition", which means there

[6] Walcott does not spell out what exactly is involved in this "conversion", i.e. who is converted from what to what else. But presumably he means his early desire to overcome his alienation from his people and become—ie. convert to—the majority.

is no real sense of completion as the word normally connotes, but instead it is the opening up of a direction, a reaching out to the people. It is in this sense that we could say Walcott's attitude towards his early frustration and resolution thereof is sympathetic on the whole. And I think what Walcott really does with these lines here is to dramatize his early self's over-romanticized view of his identity and his troubled relationship with his people—while at the same time, by implication, distance his current self from it as better informed with the nature of his hybridity and equipped with more sophisticated strategies for handling such situations.

Reading the passage quoted above, although it is doubtful that this somewhat dramatized event should really have been *the* moment that ushered Walcott into seriously writing plays and poetry, it does highlight the close connection between Walcott's literary career and his commitment to his people—one constantly inspired yet often frustrated by his cultural identity. And through his literary endeavour over the past six decades, this connection has proven a tight and lasting one. In the interview with Walcott in 2005, Simon Stanford asked Walcott about his motivations for *Omeros*, and Walcott's answer, stating once again his commitment to the Caribbean, deserves to be quoted in full:

> S.S: "You write epic poetry, you wrote *Omeros*. That is not a popular kind of form at all. What lies behind that? What stimulates you to sit down and write an epic poem?"
>
> D.W: "I'm not crazy about the word 'epic', because it has such a

> pompous echo to it. It's a long book, and I guess it's epical in the sense that the Caribbean experience has been epical—the Middle Passage is epical, the journey across from India to here, the piracy, the different things that have happened in the Caribbean. But [regarding] that particular book, what made me want to continue it daily, and enjoy working on it every day, the propelling thing, was celebration. I wanted to celebrate the island and the people that I knew. So at the back of it there was a joy of responsibility in doing it, that made me want to get up in the morning and work on it. Plus, of course, the form: the form was exciting because I had to write rhyming hexameters alternating with…whatever—the Terza rima design, you know. It was a challenging thing to do, and because it was formal in that respect, then it was exciting to get up to do it." [my transcription] (Stanford, 27:19)

What is most impressive about this answer however, apart from Walcott's lasting commitment to "the island and the people", is his conceptualization of the Caribbean experiences, especially its colonial past, on the epic scale. This move could not have been made at a better time than when Walcott was responding to questions about *Omeros*—his epic poem about normal people's life in St. Lucia which brought him the Nobel Prize, and whose very title invokes Homer. Although he took care to phrase his answer into an expression of personal stance, reiterating his declared indifference to the term "epic", the thrust of this move is not to deny *Omeros* of any epical quality, but to shift it to its subject matter—the Caribbean experience. Further, the association of the Caribbean with Homeric epics is complemented by Walcott's discussion of the challenging epic form: the hexameter and Terza rima. Again, although Walcott related to his usage of the

epic form as a challenge he had personally accepted, deliberately or not, this brings the recognition that the Caribbean experience is comparable, in terms of gravity and greatness, to those heroic deeds recounted in canonical epic stories; and that epic—the highest form of poetry—is fully appropriate and suitable, both in terms of content and form, to embody the Caribbean experience. Thus Walcott's answer to Stanford's question is never only about the nature of his work as a celebration of the Caribbean, nor is it merely to point out that his commitment to the Caribbean has through the years become his joyful responsibility. The response itself, I think, has also become something of a celebration, a tribute to "the land and the people".

That said, the unmistakable cheerfulness in Walcott's tone while answering Stanford's questions, the sanguine and joyful mood upon mentioning the word "celebration", still for a moment seem to invite doubts. After all, "celebration" has not been a word that could be lightly used, especially in situations with a (post-)colonial undertone, because it easily betrays a naïve optimism typical of most earlier Caribbean writers who, as Victor Chang summarizes, had often sought to "recognize the differences in their landscape and slowly coming to terms with it...through a passionate declaration of love for its beauty and splendour." (Chang, 241) But of course this does not mean the word "celebration" itself is in any way stigmatized by the undertone of naivety; right on the contrary, I think Walcott's usage of it in that straightforward, unequivocal manner has, in a way, helped lifting the cloud of naivety around the word.

Although once again Walcott has phrased his answer from a personal angle and specified "celebration" as the task of *Omeros*, his response, as I said, struck one with suspicions of naivety at first, but then revealed a deeper knowledge of his literary vision and project. To put it simply, Walcott's "celebration" bespeaks a stance different from the one still shared by many writers now—for Walcott, becoming "wiser" does not necessarily mean becoming also "sadder"; and while being more informed about the "complexities and ambiguities that lie at the heart of the West Indian experience", the writer, as Walcott sees it, may still do more than just "accepting it" (Chang, 242), and come to embrace and appreciate such complexities.

Given our knowledge of *Omeros*, we could say that Walcott's stance is no doubt ultimately more informed and sophisticated than the early ecstatic glorification of Caribbean landscape or experience. Besides, admittedly, Walcott's literary stature as the Nobel laureate had certainly added weight to his words in his unflinching use of "celebration" during that interview. Yet the general sense of optimism that Walcott displayed, although not a false or naïve one, did make it easy for one to overlook the complexity at the bottom of it. Coming back to the issue of Walcott's troubled relationship with his people, and examining the conflict it causes with the poet's always outspoken commitment to his people, I believe the anxiety caused by this conflict is still very much present, despite the optimism with which Walcott might have un/consciously masked it. After all, such anxiety is ultimately the result of his hybrid identity,

which means that although Walcott could find various ways to come to terms with it, it would be almost impossible, I think, to totally eliminate the tensions it causes.

How Walcott's optimistic outlook and his deeper anxiety square with each other is a large and extremely complicated issue; and should one attempt to thoroughly address it, one must be equipped with more extensive biographical information, especially about Walcott's major activities and engagements in the past decade. Since this involves too much digression into the biographical and the psychological dimensions, it is beyond the limits and purpose of my study to trace the issue in that direction. But it would still be useful to make a quick note here. Although as we have discussed, Walcott's early frustration by his alienation from his people was a crucial factor which has contributed to his lasting commitment to the Caribbean in his literary career, in practice, he has quite clearly separate goals for his different literary projects, as he has divided them between his poetry and drama. Generally speaking, it is Walcott's plays, much more so than his poetry, that throughout the years have been making the most efforts to reach out to his own people in the Caribbean. As Walcott himself reflects upon his experiences in the theatre, "[i]t was as if, with this sinewy, tuned, elate company, he was repaying the island an ancestral debt." (Walcott, *WTS*, 33) Tejumola Olaniyan, studying Walcott's plays and theatrical undertakings, notes that "it is in the area of drama and performance that [Walcott] has touched the largest number and most diverse sections of the Caribbean"

(Olaniyan, 82). This observation is in accordance with, as we have seen, what Walcott recalls as his early resolution in "What the Twilight Says". His poetry works, by contrast, are often more personal, in a sense more meditative or even philosophical, and with much heavier European footnotes. It is important to understand that this is not to say that Walcott's poetry stays away from the Caribbean experience and issues—it is often heavily informed and inspired by that—but to recognize the fact that his poetry, being highly mediated, often dealing with issues on more fundamental or abstract levels, and requiring much greater efforts as well as learning from the reader's part, are undoubtedly much less accessible for the common people in the Caribbean—those to whom he would want to reach, and to whom Walcott has felt he owes his duty to. In this respect, drama is certainly a much more workable genre.

Thus, it is reasonable to say that although poetry has always been the more "meditative" medium through which Walcott deals with the more fundamental, philosophical, and personal issues about his being, life and career, it has never enjoyed the immediacy and accessibility of that other more "performative" genre of drama through which he has established and maintained a strong connection to the Caribbean people, and hence probably has never been as effective as drama in appeasing that deep anxiety in Walcott caused by his hybrid identity[7]. I think this partly explains the frequent thematization of the division and search for identity in Walcott's poetry works, the persistent

[7] On the other hand, though, it has garnered the attention/admiration of the international community. While Walcott is widely known as both a poet and a dramatist, he is more celebrated for his achievements in poetry.

questioning of the meanings of loyalty and betrayal, as well as the constant attempt to come to terms with one's hybridity. In many of these cases, for example, the idea of travelling, of being a traveller, of leaving home and of finally homecoming, serve as overarching metaphors for Walcott's own sense of division within himself, his mixed cultural allegiances, and his anxiety about his alienation from his people as well as the betrayal that he might have committed. Other similar themes and images abound in Walcott's poetry works throughout the years. As Jeffrey Gray has noted, "[f]rom 'A Far Cry of Africa' and 'The Divided Child' onward, Walcott has crafted hundreds of metaphors for conflicted identity, creolism, the subject poisoned by, gifted by, caught between, or shuttling between two worlds" (Gray, 117).

It is also interesting to notice that during the interview by Stanford, Walcott took care to emphasize his connections to the Caribbean, St. Lucia in particular. He answered Stanford's question about his ancestry, relating to his African, English, and Dutch origins, and then immediately stressed that "everybody's got some mixture of something". And when Stanford asked what the Caribbean situation has brought to his writing, he answered:

> What that does, is it gives you a bilingual situation, a bicultural situation—very strong African presences there in terms of the rituals, Catholic religion, African rituals; the music is very strongly influenced by African rhythms, and so on. But of course, one studies English literature, so all that...was very fertile for me. [my transcription] (Stanford, 1:40)

These words sound like distant echoes to Walcott's recollection of that religious

parade of the black people in "What the Twilight Says", where there were also the music and rhythms and "strong African presence". But in terms of his reaction, the later Walcott, compared to his early childhood self, seems to have become much more comfortable with his relationship with his native land and people, i.e. much more ready to face, comprehend, contain and even draw from, this previously alienating force.

It seems that Walcott, now a Nobel Prize laureate and an international literary celebrity, has emerge from the depth of alienation that frustrated his childhood, as well as from the doubts and fears of betraying (his "island and the people") caused by his departure from St. Lucia years ago to further his literary career. What he said in the interview would sound perfectly natural and understandable—almost like something of certainty—to anyone who lacks knowledge about "What the Twilight Says", and who would therefore assume an unquestionable connection between a writer and his native land and people. Yet chewing on this significant change—which certainly had not waited till then to happen—one wonders what has become of Walcott's anxiety and the deep alienation he used to feel; and whether or not he has really arrived at such a seemingly comfortable relationship with his land and people. In fact, my last question will make more sense if phrased the reversed way: It is worth examining whether or not Walcott is really comfortable with that "new" relationship he has arrived at with his land and people.

I think it is highly doubtful that Walcott is ever satisfied with what his work

has brought him in terms of that relationship. It is undeniable, though as I said, that throughout the years he certainly has become better able to comprehend and contain the tensions inherent to his hybrid identity, as well as developed different strategies to cope with his complicated relationship to his people in and outside his work. But the very fact that one needs strategies presupposes the existence of the problem itself. After all, this whole undertaking has proven an ongoing process which, due to the very nature of its causes, requires constant renegotiations between Walcott the artist (as a poet or a dramatist; third world or metropolitan) and the primary subject as well as the ultimate goal of his art. Further, the non-ceasing task of coping with the anxiety and reaching out to his people through his art seems also to have suffered, sometimes, from its own means—particularly due to the difficulties of Walcott's demanding poetry. And while over the past forty years he has made great efforts to reach out to the Caribbean people through his theatre works[8], Walcott must have also recognized on the other hand the conflicts between the metropolitan/elitist tendency and the cultural/political responsibility in the nature of his poetry. Thus while in the Stanford interview Walcott talked about the "joy of responsibility" of writing *Omeros*, it is very likely that he actually meant by that phrase the "joy of *fulfilling* a responsibility" (to the people) which has often been frustrated and left unfulfilled. *Omeros*, a grand undertaking in poetry crucial to his winning the

[8] Both Tajumola Olaniyan and Bruce King have noted the extensive range of works and roles that Walcott has devoted himself to in his efforts to set up theatre groups and workshops—most notably the TTW (Trinidad Theatre Workshop). Olaniyan, for instance, notes that Walcott has been the absolute leading figure in West Indian theatre and TTW in the past decades, serving as "artistic director, writer, public relations officer, script scout, manager, bookkeeper, acting coach, tour organizer, and much more" (Olaniyan, 82)

Nobel Prize, in a way serves as the counterweight that levels up Walcott's poetry to his theatre works in terms of the fulfillment of that "responsibility".

In the Stanford interview, while asked if he thought his poetry had a readership in the Caribbean, Walcott answered promptly: "I don't think poetry has a readership anywhere really", but then he immediately added:

> If you go to a poetry reading in the Guggenheim Museum, or the YMHA, the full audience might be something like four hundred / five hundred. If you take a place like New York, with so many million, that percentage of people attending a poetry reading is very very small. And proportionally talking, in terms of having a poetry reading in the Caribbean, and in which you may have a hundred people, percentage wise, there are more people at that poetry reading in the Caribbean than there are in the Guggenheim! [my transcription] (Stanford, 5:50)

It is understandable that Walcott should want to highlight the Caribbean readership of his poetry, as winning a good readership is itself a sign of recognition and acceptance. Yet this should not have been his only goal, and certainly not his ultimate goal for his poetry. Otherwise, should Walcott strive all these years only for a wide readership as his way of reaching out and paying tribute to his people—and thereby ease his lasting anxiety, his poetry might have been completely different from what it is now, both in terms of subject matter and style. Put it simply, if Walcott only wanted to gain more readers—the common Caribbean population, "his people"—he must at least have long rendered his poetry more accessible and attuned to both the public taste as well

as the common range of knowledge/topics[9]–much more so than it is now.

Thus I think Walcott has quite separate goals for his drama and his poetry, although this does not mean that they are not connected by/to some common larger concerns of Walcott for the Caribbean. The significant difference between the receptions (both popular and critical) of his plays and poetry also indicate that Walcott has been targeting different audiences as well as different issues with these two genres. In various occasions, as I have mentioned, Walcott has stated his commitment to the Caribbean, which seems to imply that he writes primarily for it and its people. Yet it is certainly wrong to assume from such statements that Walcott is satisfied with becoming something like an "artist of the people", or a "national artist", who solely grounds his works in his own nation for resources, readership and critical reception. In practice, generally speaking, Walcott's engagement with the theatre centres mainly around the Caribbean[10]—the West Indian theatres and the TTW, through which he has been addressing issues pertinent to the Caribbean experience as a whole region (i.e. instead of from a narrow nationalistic perspective)[11], and thereby maintained immediate and direct connections to "the land and the people". Otto Heim, in his article "Derek Walcott's *The Last Carnival* in Modernist Light", has provided

[9] Perhaps an even simpler way to put it would be: to make his poetry, in theme and style, more like his plays.

[10] There have been Broadway productions and European productions of his plays, no doubt, besides his Boston Playwright's Theatre in Boston University. Yet as Walcott himself recognizes, in the Stanford interview and elsewhere: the subjects of his plays, generally speaking, are "not Broadway box office materials"; and besides, the Broadway reception of his plays has never concerned him very much, since he has meant his plays primarily for the Caribbean audience.

[11] Otto Heim has noted Walcott's emphasis on the cultural unity of the Caribbean: "For Walcott, cultural development in the West Indies has always involved a regional, rather than a nationalist perspective, encompassing the entire Caribbean archipelago rather than individual islands by themselves." (Heim, 295)

very useful insights about "Walcott's consistent acknowledgement of the individual artist's *communal responsibility and function*, his notion of the leading role of the artist and of art as a *unifying and cohesive force*...as well as his sense of the innovative potential of traditions" [italics mine] (Heim, 297). Further, although it is not central to this study to examine Walcott's modernist influences, it is nevertheless useful to bring in Heim's summary of one of the four major Modernist characteristics of Walcott's plays—which helps highlight the commitment of his theatre endeavours to the region. Arguing in a different direction, Heim points out the "pragmatic orientation" of Walcott's drama: "It is by embodying the fundamental predicament of a society that the play can hope to realize its communal function." (Heim, 299)

On the other hand, Walcott's poetry has sought to go further, beyond the Caribbean, as it addresses a much larger group of readers/critics, and explores the aesthetics and politics of not only Caribbean issues but also other topics in the larger tradition of English literature. Woven into the fabric of European literary and art traditions with stronger yet still subtler threads, it has evolved into the definitive form of Walcott's literary career with even greater complexity in terms of its subject matter, style, vision and aim. Heim is certainly right when he points out that "Walcott's stance and vision have been remarkably consistent" (Heim, 296). While this remark focuses mainly on Walcott's plays, when it comes to his poetry, a further note to add is: such consistency has been, understandably, the result of some lasting issues and predicaments that for a

long time have been facing the Caribbean—and hence Walcott himself. In his ongoing efforts to handle these issues, Walcott's anxiety has not only persisted, but also become more complicated.

If his wish to ease that sense of alienation he experienced in childhood, as Walcott recalls it in "What the Twilight Says", has in a way been the urge behind his literary undertaking; then the fact that throughout the years Walcott has time and again come back on the issue of alienation suggests that such anxiety has always remained present. Anthony Kellman, in his review of *The Arkansas Testament* (1987), notes the poet's strong "feelings of guilt" in "The Light of the World" (1986) for having abandoned his people (Kellman, 607). Sixteen years since "What the Twilight Says" and almost five decades since that early parade of the black people, Walcott still feels that sense of alienation distinctly—despite his unceasing efforts, through his works, to renegotiate his relationship to this group that he calls "his people". Noticeably, however, this sense of alienation is somehow transformed from his early thwarted desire to "join the parade", to a more complicated feeling of guilt for not being able to fulfill his duty to his people. Many critics have commented on the self-reflexive ending of this poem[12]: "There was nothing they wanted, nothing I could give them / but this thing I have called 'The Light of the World'" (*The Arkansas Testament*, 51). These lines reflect upon the poem itself and serve as Walcott's own verdict on his work as incapable of fulfilling his responsibility to his people. But this poem

[12] Besides Kellman, see also Paul Breslin: *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*. pp.239-40; and Laurence A. Breiner: "Creole Language in the Poetry of Derek Walcott" in *Callaloo* 28.1 (2005). 38-40.

expresses not merely the poet's guilt for not being able to give something back to his people to redeem his betrayal, but also a deep anxiety about the nature of representation and the incapacity of his poetry—his art in general—to represent his people.

Rei Terada, in a detailed study of the poem in "Derek Walcott and the Poetics of 'Transport'", points out that through the process of the poem, Walcott has come to see his female subject—a local black woman taking the same van with the him—"first as an individual woman", "the next moment…as art" ("if this were a portrait…/ it was like a statue, like a black Delacroix's / Liberty Leading the People"), and in the end "as Beauty itself" ("O Beauty, you are the light of the world"). Terada notes that

> Walcott's deepening aesthetic possession of the woman coincides with the gradual disappearance of her physical self in deepening darkness. In the moment before she becomes Beauty, nothing remains but a "profile" and a highlight. It is entirely possible that in the moment Walcott apotheosizes her, she completely disappears. Beauty may be "the light of the world," but the apotheosizing capacity of Walcott's own language is firmly associated with darkness. (Terada 1991)

What Terada's reading has foregrounded is the paradox that: the more the poet wishes to celebrate and "capture"—"possess" the beauty of his subject, the farther she seems to drift away from his possession. The very attempt to immortalize certain qualities of the subject almost entirely supercedes the subject herself. From "the beauty" to "Beauty", the woman becomes increasingly objectified and dehumanized—shrunken into the stillness of a

portrait, a statue, and finally a patch of highlight. Reading these into the poet's lament in the ending lines—"There was nothing they wanted, nothing I could give them / but this thing I have called 'The Light of the World'"—it is obvious that Walcott is reflecting on the incapacity of his poetry to aptly and fully represent his people. Moreover, as Breiner points out, in this poem it seems that Marley, the singer whose song which enjoys wide popularity among the people is now being played in the radio of the van, is "the people's true poet", since "his song sustains them on their journey of life" (Breiner, 39). In other words, Marley is the true poet in the sense that he could give the people "what they want"; Walcott, in contrast, has got "nothing they want", and the moment of his "poetic triumph" (Terada 1991) is achieved by his failure to fulfill his duty to the people. Finally, as Terada reads:

> Walcott represents St. Lucia at large by means of the female figures in "The Light of the World," just as he calls the Antillean population by a series of female names in "Sainte Lucie" (Collected Poems 1948-1984, 309-323). Luce, of course, means "light," and Beauty in the poem is also tied to light. The woman in the transport therefore represents St. Lucia, which for Walcott coincides with Beauty. (Terada 1991)

While the unrepresentable Beauty represents St. Lucia, the poet's failed responsibility is to his entire Caribbean region, since "The Light of the World" is a reflection on the troubled relationship between Walcott's poetry and its subject, on the problems inherent to his poetics, his way of seeing and conceptualizing his subject in his poetry, and on the whole on the nature of representation itself. M. Travis Lane, commenting on *Another Life* in an earlier essay, also notes this

problematic relationship between the poet's work and his subjects: "the crisis of *Another Life* has to do with the relationship of the artist's ambition to his possible audience. The audience...in Walcott...is a problem through—the people for whom the artist creates reject his art." (Lane, 66) Herein, I think, lies the anxiety already much transformed from Walcott's early sense of alienation[13] into the anxiety about the problem of representation and of his poetics. It is, just like "The Light of the World", self-reflexive, and involves a self-positioning based on self-knowledge. In other words, Walcott recognizes, as Lane notes, that "the art through which [he] has learned to see is alien to this other world [of his people]." (Lane, 71)

Such an anxiety has as its basis a demand—on the poet—for representation, which Walcott clearly perceives. The problematic representation of the Caribbean has long been a known issue. And representation (and therefore the implied interpretation) itself has also been understood as a project loaded with cultural/political agendas. Photography—and its derivative products such as postcards—often generate the illusion of reality through its assumed "scientific accuracy", with which not only the material reality is "recorded" but also are the non-material aspects of a culture measured through visual implications. Robert M. Levine comments on this issue in his essay "Historical Writing and Visual Imagery: Photographs as Documents":

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[13] "Transform" may still be a little misleading since it seems to imply the dissolution of the previous anxiety; while what I actually mean here is that the previous anxiety as a sense of alienation still exists but in a more complicated form, and has developed from Walcott's previous simple thwarted desire to join, to a more informed recognition of the problematic means with which he tries to connect to the people. In a way, the developed anxiety is the extension and expansion of the early, more fundamental anxiety—one caused ultimately, as suggested in "What the Twilight Says", by his hybrid identity.

> Itinerant photographers roamed the continents to capture the exotic, the romantic, and the formerly unknown. The Comptean passion for measuring civilization by material progress—urban reconstruction, widening boulevards, marble and limestone monuments—elevated the most successful of photographer-entrepreneurs to the status of civic seers, clarions of progress. (Levine, 48)

The representation of the Caribbean is very similar in nature, but with a major twist towards tourism. In the Stanford interview, Walcott also speaks of the two contradictory perceptions of the Caribbean: 1) the usual cliché representation of it as a tourist place with "hotels, waiters, Calypso, steel band, and beaches" which has been an image constructed by the much needed tourist industry; and 2) the lack of interest in the "real Caribbean which is [perceived as] small and negligible in a way" (Stanford, 2:40). The first type of representation, as Walcott sees it, is unfortunate as it is a form of "benign slavery" (Stanford, 3:30), a "prostitution of a tourist culture" (Walcott, *WTS*, 24) which exploits and neglects the need of the Caribbean people:

> The Caribbean is extremely photogenic, and so poverty is photogenic. And a lot of people are photographed in their poverty—sometimes it's kind of exploited: poverty can be exploited sentimentally, in terms of presenting certain images that are good for tourism…All of those clichés [are what] one has to avoid. I think it's almost the duty of the writer to protect the people from that kind of cliché exploitation of them. [my transcription] (Stanford, 4:58)

Although it is clear that Walcott has always been acutely conscious of his "duty" as the Caribbean writer, there still seems to have been a gap between this

perceived duty and what his actual work, especially his poetry, amounts to. In this respect, the demand of representation upon Walcott and the tension it causes with Walcott's poetics have remained largely unchanged throughout the years, during which Walcott has changed from third-world writer into the Nobel laureate and literary celebrity. The change in his literary status, however, has not helped lift the pressure but has in a way added to it. Jeffrey Gray, in "Walcott's Traveler and the Problem of Witness", notes the "double edge" of fame: "[a]lthough Walcott's many awards represent long overdue acknowledgement of Caribbean literary value, they also confirm the work's appeal to, and coherence within, old centers of power in European and America." (Gray, 118) Moreover, the paradox which the established Walcott must come to terms with seems to be: the more he becomes a metropolitan, international literary figure, the more the old bipolar worldview haunts back, and the more the issue of his origin demands attention and treatment. Although a Nobel laureate, Walcott is still perceived by most as "an ethnic Caribbean poet, or as hybrid of Europe and Africa", and is "subject to a *burden of representation*", and therefore a kind of criticism," from which many poets might be exempted. [italics mine] (Gray, 118) Such a "burden" of representation—which Gray defines as the demand of "fidelities" on the poet to "speak for [his] people", to "be faithful to local, ethnic, or national constituencies" (Gray, 118)—combined with the perceived problematic relationship between Walcott's poetics and his subjects, aptly summarizes the sense of guilt and anxiety expressed in poems like "The Light of the World".

On another level, the demand of representation on Walcott is also the inevitable result of certain basic cultural assumptions. The paradox that the more Walcott moves into the international/metropolitan "centre", the more he is also tightly connected to the "peripheral" may be the result of the (pseudo-)shift of critical focus in literary and cultural studies nowadays. Yet it also highlights the almost unparalleled and ineradicable "visibility" of racial otherness. As W. J. T. Mitchell notes:

> Race is what can be *seen* (and therefore named) in skin color, facial features, hair, etc. Whiteness, by contrast, is invisible, unmarked; it has no racial identity, but is equated with a normative subjectivity and humanity from which "race" is a visible deviation. (Mitchell, 162)

The position of the "visible other", which Walcott and his work still occupy, is built not only on the old centre-peripheral assumption of Eurocentricism, but also on the old centre's new critical interest in the former peripheral, which gestures to grant the latter a recognition of its (central) importance while maintaining much of its own privileges. Thus while Walcott's works have brought him closer than ever to the position of a central, metropolitan and international writer, they did so because of their complexities as the result of their creator's manifested (i.e. highly visible) otherness as a Caribbean writer. In other words, the Caribbean not only places the demand on Walcott's works, but also becomes the indispensible ingredient for their success. Walcott, then, is "burdened" by his connection to the Caribbean in multiple ways.

As we could see, this burden stems from the fundamental anxiety of Walcott's early poems like "A Far Cry from Africa", and extends all the way into later works such as *Omeros*. Its persistent presence, and the ongoing effort to handle it, have been the major drive behind Walcott's creations which not only seek to deal with such a burden, but also thereby serve as a means of self-placement that negotiates the poet's position with his people.

On the other hand, what even further complicates this burden and the anxiety it produces, is Walcott's literary aspiration. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Walcott, thoroughly educated in the Western literary tradition, ultimately aims to demonstrate that his work is of the same caliber as the defining figures in that canon. He writes in "What the Twilight Says", "I saw myself legitimately prolonging the mighty line of Marlowe, of Milton..." (Walcott, *WTS*, 28). Walcott has always been consciously placing his works alongside the canonical. And through his voluminous works, especially works like *Omeros*, he has not only demonstrated his close relation to the founding figures and their works in the Western literary canon, but has also constructed such a connection as in itself highly similar to the way in which other great figures, such as Joyce or Yeats, have connected to the canon. At the same time, however, Walcott has been acutely aware of the pressures and tensions involved in such an endeavour, as he goes on in "What the Twilight Says":

> [B]ut my sense of inheritance was stronger because it came from estrangement. I would learn that every tribe hoards its culture as fiercely as its prejudices, that English literature, even in the theatre, was

> hallowed ground and trespass, that colonial literatures could grow to resemble it closely but could never be considered its legitimate heir. …their function, as far as their mother country was concerned, was filial and tributary. (Walcott, *WTS*, 28)

Patrick Colm Hogan, in his book *Empire and Poetic Voice*, reads this passage as "addressing the inhibitions colonialism places on the formation of [Walcott's literary] reference sets and on [his] self-location with respect to such sets." (Hogan, 158) The "inhibition" Walcott is aware of is the regulating chronology of a literary history—a literary genealogy which prioritizes and closes the canon of the "mother country" as the origin, and denies writers like Walcott the access into this canon, as well as the legitimacy for him to calibrate his own works against the reference set in which there are "the mighty line of Marlowe, of Milton". Further, while striving to overcome this barrier, Walcott's literary maneuvers have, inevitably, caused further tensions between his literary aspiration and his burden/duty as a Caribbean writer, as well as incurred various criticisms.

Gray has summarized the three major criticisms facing Walcott's poetry, which has often been regarded as "too distant from the material realities of the Caribbean" (Gray, 118): 1) critics often ask, citing his "immersion in European traditions", "whether Walcott is re- or decolonizing the Afro-Caribbean by stealing literary types from former slavers"; 2) critics often note Walcott's "tendency to the universally symbolic" which seems to transcend history and

circumvent cultural meditation[14]; and 3) critics "question the poet's biography", pointing to the discrepancies between his claimed commitment to the Caribbean and his career and life divided between the Caribbean and the Euro-American world, asking whether Walcott sees the Caribbean through the eye of a colonizer[15] (Gray, 118). What these criticisms have mainly focused on, as we could see, is again the old yet lasting tension between Walcott's poetics and his duty. And as my discussion above has shown, the issue of representation has always been at the core of this tension. Pulling from it on both ends, however, are other deeply relevant issues: on the one hand, there is the demand/burden upon Walcott to speak and write for his "land and the people"; on the other hand, Walcott's literary ambition seems to have been constantly drawing him away from fulfilling his duty to the Caribbean.

So far I have been trying to examine and map out in detail the issues constituting the anxiety and tension which have been the driving force behind Walcott's literary creations. And now it seems that a follow-up question to ask would be: Given the burden of representation upon Walcott, his literary aspiration, as well as his recognition of the problems that his unique poetics causes, why has he for all these years persisted to write poetry in such a style (that does not seem to have brought him any closer to his people)? Answering this question, I think, requires a clearer understanding of the nature and *strategy*

[14] On this point, Gray cites Paul Breslin: "'I Met History Once, But He Ain't Recognize Me': Poetry of Derek Walcott" in *TriQuarterly* 68 (Winter 1987), pp. 177.
[15] Gray cites Susan Gingell: "Returning to Come Forward: Dionne Brand Confronts Derek Walcott" in *Journal of West Indian Literature* 6.2 (1994), pp. 44.

of Walcott's literary project. Thus in the following chapters, my task is to understand what Walcott's literary strategy has been and how it has enabled him to continue writing poetry in this style while at the same time handle the delicate relationship between his burden/duty to his people on the one hand, and his literary aspiration on the other. As I have suggested in the Introduction, central to Walcott's strategy is his unique and highly creative employment of the synergy between paintings and poetry, or the visual and the verbal in general, on both the level of aesthetics and politics. Hence the following chapters will be devoted to a detailed analysis of the nature and functions of this synergy.

CHAPTER II
FROM "THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION" TO "THE BURDENED REPRESENTATION": WALCOTT'S POETIC MEDITATION THROUGH THE VISUAL ART

In the previous chapter I have examined the way in which Walcott, due to his hybrid cultural origins and his dual identity as both an international, metropolitan, literary celebrity and a Caribbean poet, has been placed at the centre of conflicting demands from both his cultural responsibility and his literary aspiration. For writers caught in such constant tensions like Walcott, finding the right strategy which helps to tactfully handle the subtle relationships between these conflicting demands has always been an urgent necessity. As I have suggested in the introductory chapter, for Walcott the solution lies in strategically exploring the potentials and range of the visual-verbal synergy. In this respect, at the end of the previous chapter, I have suggested that Walcott has been writing poetry in his highly unique style in the past six decades, and this seems to have already testified to the efficaciousness of his literary strategy. Specifically, it is by strategically employing the visual elements in his poetry, by breaking the assumed visual-verbal boundaries, destabilizing the visual-verbal relationship, and crossing the two spheres into each other, that Walcott has turned the visual-verbal synergy into an empowering element of his poetics, which enables him to address both his duty to the Caribbean and his literary goal. In the following sections, therefore, I will examine the different ways in which Walcott invokes the visual-verbal synergy in his poetry, and try to understand

how it functions to help him tackle his "burden of representation" on the one hand, and his literary aspiration on the other. As I have noted earlier, in practice these two moves tend to frequently overlap and merge into one single maneuver. For the sake of clarity in my analysis, however, I will examine the function of the visual-verbal synergy to those two ends separately, with the present chapter mainly focused on how it helps Walcott to handle issues involved in his "burden of representation", and the next chapter on how it may also embody Walcott's literary aspiration.

Given the fact that Walcott was born and educated in an environment deeply influenced by European literary and art traditions, and that he, as did his father, has for years been an enthusiastic practitioner of the art of painting, it is easy for one to take his frequent engagement with paintings and visual art in general in his poetics to be a natural result of personal preferences cultivated through his upbringing and education. This may be partly the case, as Walcott never denies his passion for painting or his appreciation of the ability of paintings to "teach". Although a celebrated poet now, in an interview with Akintayo Abodunrin in 2009, he still seems to betray a partiality for painting over poetry, as well as a preference for the immediately visual over the abstract, as he said: "I don't do abstract painting; I don't believe in it. … I think one immediate thing about painting is that:… you can't know right away about poetry, whether the poem is good or not, it takes a little while for it to marinate. One knows immediately if a painting is good." Besides, he also mentions that "[one] can learn from painting

how to look at landscape or portrait. So painting can teach more, I think, to writing - than writing can to painting." Yet Walcott's answers here could be deceptively simple and straightforward. Comparing his answers to the questions they address, it is not difficult to find that while the first question: "What do you think are the interactions or differences between painting and writing a poem?" addresses a general comparison between the two forms of artistic creation, Walcott's answer, which proceeds from "I don't do abstract painting; I don't believe in it...", immediately avoids the original scope of inquiry and personalizes it, drawing the attention to his own particular practices as he continues to say: "I do a lot of portraits, landscapes as well - and I work in both oils and watercolour." Apart from that, when he does partially return to the question and compares painting and poetry, his answer still drifts away from the focus of the question and instead comments separately on certain characteristics of the two art forms. As I have suggested, it is easy for us to take Walcott's answer as displaying a preference for painting's immediate visuality over poetry's abstractness, while actually it is at most a neutral comment. In other words, recognizing the visuality of painting and the abstractness of poetry does not necessarily privilege either over the other. If anything, Walcott might be saying that the appreciation of poetry, because of its relative abstractness, is a more intellectually challenging task. Moreover, his following comment that painting can teach poetry more things than poetry can do to painting, when read together with his earlier view on the visuality and abstractness of the two forms,

could be understood accordingly as a rather roundabout way of praising poetry's higher capacity to absorb, assimilate, or transform pictorial elements for its own enrichment—that poetry can become picture-like, perhaps more easily than for paintings to be "poetic".

Why Walcott has phrased his answers in such a way is a question open to different explanations. One possible answer that I suggest here is, by appearing to focus on painting while actually still emphasizing the capacity of poetry to incorporate picturesque elements, Walcott is trying to highlight the significance of painting to his poetry, while maintaining firmly grounded in his poetic orientation. In other words, he could be drawing attention to the elements of painting in his poetry, and emphasizing the importance of reading and understanding his poetry as informed by various paintings—landscapes and portraits in particular. In this sense, though appearing to digress from the focus of the question about the relationship between painting and poetry, Walcott actually has, in a way, answered the question—i.e. with special emphasis on that relationship as figured in his own works. Further, with the recognition of Walcott's orientation in verbal art, the role and function of visual art for the poet's life and work could be better understood. One may say that painting has always been as much an indispensible part of Walcott's life as his poetry; and when it comes to his literary project, painting is also an integral part of his aesthetic "working vocabulary". This is not to bring in once again the issue of Walcott's family influence and "traditional" education. Rather, I have coined this

phrase in order to emphasize that for Walcott's literary project, paintings are important and useful *not* so much because they may be aesthetically consummate, valuable or stimulating for the poet, but because they possess highly usable semiotic functions/potentials. For Walcott, paintings in the European art tradition often work, in a way, just like signs from a semiotic system—e.g. words/phrases/sentences in a language. And just like people speaking in words of a certain language, Walcott (in his poetry) frequently "speaks in paintings". More precisely: he frequently speaks, expresses his views, concerns and desires, in a "language of paintings". A final important note on this general "painting-language" metaphor is: its "vocabulary", certainly, consists not of any direct visual signs such as those paintings themselves or any forms of visual reproductions of them but must still be constituted in words (in the various ways briefly surveyed in my introductory chapter)—no matter when paintings are referred to (as when Walcott mentions certain paintings, painters, or painted subjects) or verbally invoked (as in Walcott's more painterly or ekphrastic poems)[16]. And it is such verbal rendering of the paintings or verbal parody of paintings, etc. that have been Walcott's most ready "working vocabulary" through which he speaks. And it is also in such strategic deployment of the visual-verbal synergy that Walcott has enabled himself to

[16] I hope this general "painting-language" metaphor has not served the opposite of its purpose by creating more confusion than clearing away the potential ones. Admittedly, it can be a bit confusing to use words like "language" on both the literal and figurative levels in a same metaphor; but this perhaps also aptly illustrates the complexity of Walcott's visual-verbal poetics. Generally, when I mean literal language, I use the term "word"; and when I say "vocabulary", I mean Walcott's verbal rendering of/references to the paintings he has always known so well. Thus it is the way in which he renders/refers to these paintings (his employment of the visual-verbal synergy) that, as I said, "speaks, expresses his views, concerns and desires". The means, at these moments, spells out the end.

handle the tension, as I have mapped out in the previous chapter, between his burden of representation and his literary aspiration.

Yet although Walcott's engagement of visual art in his poetry has been highly unique and creative, one should note that it is also the continuation and development of a larger tradition of modern Caribbean literature. Mary Lou Emery, in her book *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature*, documents a sweeping move emerging around the 1960s of "intense interactions among painters, sculptors, textile designers, poets, playwrights, fiction writers, and critics from the Caribbean", resulting in the Caribbean Artists Movement (or the CAM). Emery understands this vast moving across boundaries between the verbal and the general visual arts in both aesthetical and political contexts. The "colonial relations", as suggested in the previous chapter by my discussion about the photographic representations of the Caribbean, is "inextricably bound to the concepts and practices of seeing." (Emery, 180) The colonial discourses have thus excluded Caribbean artists from the possibility of participation, as their aesthetics is visually oriented, in which "vision reigns as the predominant sensory experience." (Emery, 180) It is in this context that moving between the boundaries of different arts gains not only its aesthetic energy but also political value.

Taking after the spirit of this general movement, Walcott's engagement of visual art in his poetry, with his unique twist towards European art tradition, is among the most sophisticated cases in Caribbean literature. As mentioned before,

central to the Caribbean situation/experience is the issue of representation—or mis-representation, for that matter. For writers like Walcott, the Caribbean, similar to other regions with heavy colonial legacies, has long been the subject of various forms of mis-/representations; therefore, the central task demanded of them by their cultural/political duty is to address such problematic representations. In Walcott's case, there are mainly three ways to approach this issue.

To begin with, Walcott often questions the nature of representation on its aesthetical and philosophical basis. His poems are often presented as meditations about the relationship between art and life/reality. Typically, Walcott phrases such discussions through frequent references to visual art. As Terada notes, "[m]editations on visual art allow Walcott to talk about writing and yet maintain a sensual and descriptive surface." (Terada, 1992, 129) Poem XVII from *Midsummer*, for example, invokes a world as perceived through the mediation of art, and ponders upon the relationship between art and the object world. In this poem the poet recalls a memorable incident when he once mistook art for real life:

> I once brushed a drop of water from a Flemish still life
> in a book of prints, believing it was real.
> It reflected the world in its crystal, quivering with weight.
> What joy in that sweat drop, knowing others will persevere! (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 27)

These lines highlight the contrast between the object world and its artistic

representation by drawing attention to their similarities. The reason that the poet would have mistaken the water drop for real is that he has mistakenly assumed that the "world" as reflected in the water drop is the same object world in which he inhabits. Art, in this case, generates the illusion of reality through its exquisite details executed in great precision. Also implied in the image of the water drop is a sense of completeness of the reflection. The water drop gives the impression/assumption that the entire world external to it is, in a sense, captured by it and reflected in it. However, the bubble of illusion explodes when the poet (and the reader) realizes that not only the reflected world in the water drop, but also the drop itself is the product of craft. The water drop thus becomes a metaphor for art, which harbours the urge to represent the external world in its own configuration of colours and forms.

On the other hand, the poet is also keenly aware of the limitations of artistic representation. He hints at the ephemerality of the drop: "knowing that others will persevere". The "others" could be read as referring to the object world, which remains even after the dew is vaporized. The relationship between art and the object world it represents is more complicated. When the painted work is concerned, what is transient is not so much the world itself—as it has certainly survived the time—but the techniques involved in its creation. After all, it is the techniques that has, in a way, "captured"/reflected the object world. But the transience of technique means that the art work itself, being the final configuration of the sum total of techniques, ultimately could only be "about a

particular moment" which is already lost in the course of its creation. The object world, whose one moment was captured in the art as it is captured in the dew, is ultimately un-representable because it itself is forever in dynamics and resists being captured or defined. The moment art attempts to represent the object world, the latter already exceeds the boundaries of art and moves on, severing the link between the representation and the represented. What is "captured" in art, therefore, is nothing more than a mere slice of the reality it so often aspires to encompass but could never contain. The dew/art-world relationship, as Terada notes, allows "at most *either* the work's internal minutiae *or* its larger structure to aspire to verisimilitude and permanence, but not both at once." (Terada, 1992, 133) The world "persevere" thus invites a different reading from its usual sense which has to do with just "moving on"—a sense of continuation in both temporal and spatial dimensions. The emphasis now is on the dynamics, freshness, and aliveness of the object world, which "perseveres" in its permanent flow in completeness even after being rendered temporarily into art's failed "sill life". More over, words like "crystal" also invokes the contrast between the solid, multifaceted reflection in the precious stone, and the ephemeral dew rendered on the surface of the canvas. Presentation, therefore, is appropriately conceived as being weighed down by its "burden"—the dew which "reflected the world" is "quivering with weight".

While in Poem XVII, Walcott meditates on the limitations of visual art which, for all its vividness and verisimilitude (to borrow Terada's term), is flat,

incomplete, and time-bound; in poems like "The Light of the World", as mentioned before, he reflects, through the self-reflexivity of the poem, upon the problematic nature of his own poetic representation of the Caribbean people. The ending of the poem, "There was nothing they wanted, nothing I could give them / but this thing I have called 'The Light of the World'" makes two separate reflections. On the literal level, it recognizes the distance and tension between the poetic representation—and hence glorification and abstraction (e.g. as "Beauty")—of the people on the one hand, and on the other the real people of the Caribbean sitting around the poet with their live substantiality and complexity. On a more general level, "this thing" can be read as referring not only to the present poem but also to poetry—the poet's craft—in general. In this sense "The Light of the World" in the last line becomes not only the citation of the present poem's title, but also the poet's way of understanding his own craft as "the light of the world". Poetry, then, is connected back to the black woman in the earlier lines who was praised as the embodiment of "Beauty" and "the light of the world". Thus Walcott is drawing a parallel between his craft and the subject of his craft and presenting his poetry as taking after, or an enactment of, the beauty of the people. In this sense poetic representation, flawed as it is, becomes a gesture of reaching out to the people. In other words, although he recognizes the incapacity of poetry—or any form of representation—to fully embody/represent/express the Caribbean experience, the attitude towards such incapacity is not despair but acceptance, with an informed understanding of not

only the flawed nature of poetic representation, but also the true needs of both the Caribbean people and the poet himself. As Paul Breslin notes, "one reason the speaker has nothing the people on the transport want is that his poems, including this one, are not what that community ask of art"; on the other hand, however, Lloyd King notes that the return of the "Caribbean intellectual" to the native land and people "is a return to a stage of grace, of wholeness", which is something needed by the poet instead of the people, who already possess it and thus want nothing (Breslin, 2001, 240). Thus "The Light of the World" could be read as Walcott's "apology" (or "defense") of his poetry—or his poetics, which treats the poet's anxiety by drawing from the grace of his subject—the Caribbean people. The poet's burden/duty of representation, therefore, is somewhat sidestepped since a faithful representation is neither what the Caribbean people really ask of the poet, nor an attainable end.

Considering the above poems together, the notion of the Caribbean people as complete with grace, in a way, echoes the notion of the real world as existing in fluctuation and fullness—both ask nothing from artistic representation. The Caribbean people in "The Light of the World", therefore, also occupy the position of the "others" who "will persevere", as in Poem XVII. And the poet's effort to pay tribute to them through his poetic representation/abstraction is thus as futile in nature as the dew drop to capture the entire world in its fullness, since even without all these efforts to represent, the world, as well as the people, would continue to exist and "persevere". In this sense, as I suggested earlier,

Walcott has shifted his "burden" of representation, from his own shoulders to representation itself. As the dew drop "quivering" with the load of the world it strives to reflect, representation is itself "burdened" by its aspiration towards fullness and completeness. On the other hand, however, the discussion above also hints that recognizing the limitations of representation does not totally cancel its value. As far as Walcott is concerned, the value of representation certainly lies not in the supposed "completeness" or "faithfulness" so frequently demanded of it—and thus demanded of the artist as well. On the contrary, the value of representation is realized by working with/through its flaws and limitations—in poetry as well as in painting.

This view is also expressed in Poem XVII. Revolving around that recalled anecdote with which Walcott reflects upon the nature of representation, is Walcott's larger meditation upon his choice of poetry over painting. Besides heavy references to the visual art in the poem, there are also images closely associated with poets and poetry writing, as the poem opens:

> I pause to hear a racketing triumph of cicadas
> setting life's pitch, but to live at their pitch
> of joy is unendurable. (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 27)

The image of cicada in the opening lines bear a classical reference to Tithonus in the Greek mythology, who is often envisaged as a *rhapsode* or rhapsodist—a type of oral epic poet; and whose most notable story was that he was granted eternal life but not eternal youth, and was later turned into a cicada. By invoking the image of cicada, Walcott engages his own life and career as a poet. What this

vocation has amounted to, however, as Walcott—now in his fifties—reflects upon it in the opening lines, seems to be troubled by a sense of impatience with poetry. What is "unendurable" is the "pitch of joy", the "racketing triumph". Reading the reference to poets into the lines, the "unendurable" song of the cicadas refers to the "song" of the poets—the rhapsody (originally a form of epic poetry[17]). The story in the background about Tithonus trapped in eternal aging is echoed in phrases such as "life's pitch" and "unendurable", and conveys a sense of weariness which seems to empty out the "triumph" and "joy". Almost like the aging Tithonus trapped in eternity, the poet feels tired out by years of poetry writing, with the troubling sense of being pinned down for life in his immovable yet declining art. Thus the poet turns away:

> … Turn off
> that sound. After the plunge of silence,
> the eye gets used to the shapes of furniture, and the mind
> to darkness. (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 27)

These lines form a sharp contrast with the preceding lines. The command: "Turn off / that sound" enacts a break-off from the previous section. The silent, dark world the poet "plunges" into is his own mind's inner space as separate from the external, bright and noisy world. The phrase "turn off" easily reminds one of the working of a switch; and it is only in his own mind that the poet could turn on and off the external world as if he was using a switch. This world, in general, lies in darkness, in which there are only shadowy "shapes" of things (like

[17] Homer's *Odyssey* was performed in this form.

"furniture") from the bright, external world. This metaphor reads like an inverted version of Plato's allegory of the cave. Into this "cave" of the poet's mind, the external world casts its shadows. But once "the mind" gets used to "darkness", the inner eye not only starts to recognize "shapes", but also becomes capable of seeing the projections of the external world in closer and more interesting connections.

> ... The cicadas are frantic as my mother's
> feet, treading the needles of approaching rain.
> Days thick as leaves then, close to each other as hours,
> And a sunburnt smell rose up from the drizzled road.
> I stitched her lines to mine now with the same machine. (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 27)

Most remarkable about these lines is the way in which the poet associates 1) distant ideas and images; 2) abstract ideas with concrete images. These lines strike the reader with their marked "poetic-ness" generated by overlapping metaphors. The highly metaphorical language requires careful reading in order to identify and separate the images which have been woven together. For example, the first two lines contain at least three batches of ideas/images: the cicadas singing "frantically", the poet's mother working by the sewing machine ("treading" on the paddle which activates the needle)[18], and the approaching rain. These images are connected to each other through metaphorical associations—not on the basis of strict correspondence but in terms of similarities in movements and sound, as well as linkage across/between

[18] The sewing machine image could be inferred from a later line "I stitch her lines to mine now with the same machine."

senses—the cicadas singing "frantically" is associated with the swift movements of the mother's feet paddling on the sewing machine; the cicadas' song, therefore, may be further connected to the creaking of the machine; and finally, the needle of the sewing machine moving up and down in fast motions invokes the image of the approaching rain's quick shower of silver "needles".

The following lines contain similar broad associations and imaginative empathies. Noticeably, the poet now imagines himself in the body of a cicada in the tree, surrounded by "[d]ays as thick as leaves, close to each other as hours", and senses the "sunburnt smell" churned up from the road by the drizzle[19]. The poet-cicada connection is invoked again, which then links back to the association of the "frantic" cicada with the mother working by the sewing machine. Thus in a way, the poet establishes a further link, through cicadas, between himself and his sewing mother—and comes to imagine himself working on his "lines" in the same way as his mother on her lines (threads), in the self-reflection: "I stitch her line to mine now with the same machine".

Combined, all these images/ideas of incessant noise and quick small movements generate a sense of restlessness in the poet's mind. It is reasonable to say that such restlessness is also ultimately connected to, or excited by, the poet's own sense of impatience expressed in the opening lines. Their difference, however, lies in the fact that the latter lines are the result of poetic processing of

[19] Just a further note: this "sunburnt smell" of fresh soil rising in the rain is, as the poet imagines it, what both he himself and the cicadas are able to experience, hence another connection between them. In fact, this is a common rhetorical move which could also be found even in ancient Chinese poetry, when the poet tries to establish connections with distant friends or lover by envisioning them experiencing the same thing at the same moment with him/her—usually through looking at the same moon.

the "raw" emotions in the opening lines. The world "now" in the last self-reflexive comment draws the attention to the present moment in which the poet is writing down the same line. In other words, the later lines constitute an example of poetic re-presentation—and with it re-conception and re-organization—of both solid beings and real feelings from the external world, thus rendering the entire section as a live demonstration of the process of poetry writing. The word "machine" is suggestive of certain mechanism with which the "lines" (of a poem) are woven together. Walcott here reflects on the process of poetry writing as one in which the multitudes of the external world are re-conceived and re-organized through the poet's mind, and *re-presented* in new relations with each other. In this view, faithfulness of representation ceases to be an issue of importance; and along with it, the burden of "responsible" representation placed upon the poet may also be partly lifted.

Moreover, a further implication of this new recognition is that the value of representation lies not in its faithfulness, but elsewhere. In a way the self-reflexivity of the last line ("I stitch her lines to mine now with the same machine") steps back from the sense of restlessness and impatience of the opening sections, and reflects upon the value of such feelings/emotions per se as possible materials for poetic processing—re-conceived and re-organized in terms of newly established connections between other objects in the external world. Thus such re-conception and re-organization of the subject in representation can be valuable strategic moves themselves, as they open up the

space for poetic (artistic) creativity. Besides, the necessary inadequacy of "flawed representation", though commonly perceived as a defect, works for Walcott to highlight, by contrast, the fullness of the subjects—such as the Caribbean people or the object world that "persevere" despite their inadequate representations. Walcott frequently uses the contrasting images of light and darkness to make this point. In Poem XVII, following the meditation on the perceptive mode (mechanism) underlying the process of poetry writing, Walcott specifies, through more examples, the type of representation he is most drawn to:

> What work lies ahead of us, what sunlight for generation!—
> The lemon-rind light in Vermeer, to know it will wait
> there for others… (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 27)

The abundance of "lights"—"sunlight", "lemon-rind light" forms a sharp contrast with the darkness invoked in the previous lines. The contrast is carried on by the reference to the Dutch baroque painter Johannes Vermeer, who was renowned for the level of sophistication in his treatment of light and highlights[20]. It is not clear which particular painting by Vermeer Walcott was referring to with this line. It is more possible that the reference is a general one, remembering Vermeer's frequent uses of some bright yellowish colours in his paintings—often on the illuminated subjects. The light-darkness relation could be read as a general metaphor about representation. While light in paintings usually illuminates part of the painted subject, the highlighted section, though an

[20] For more detailed discussion on Vermeer's usage of light, see Wadum Jørgen: "An Interview with Jørgen Wadum" at www.essentialvermeer.com. Feb. 5. 2003. URL: http://www.essentialvermeer.com/interviews_newsletter/wadum_interview.html

incomplete part in itself, heightens the sense of full existence of the subject by extending into the loaded absence (the meaningful blank) in the dark shadows. Take Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*[21] for instance, the female subject is halved by light and shadow. While light concentrates on the face and generally illuminates the front side of the girl, the back of her head and the entire upper half of her back are left in complete darkness. The illuminated (painted) parts serve the double purpose of both presenting exquisitely painted details as well as an indicating the unilluminated (unpainted, or even unpaintable) parts. The subject on the whole strikes the viewer with compelling vividness and a sense of fullness in both spatial and temporal dimensions. Representation in general, given its limitations, works in this mode: the representational "light" falls on certain specific details of the subject which, while artistically rendered, works in similar ways as the painted parts whose own incompleteness is capable of evoking the complete experience about the subject. The "lemon-rind light in Vermeer" will "wait there for others" because the incomplete lighted parts maintain the tendency towards completion. The lighted parts would "wait", therefore, for "other" unilluminated areas to manifest themselves through their own absence. The "others" in this line is echoed later in the line "knowing others will persevere". As discussed earlier, the "otherness" hints at the completeness of the subject which transcends the spatial and temporal limits of representation. Although such (transcendental) completeness can only

[21] See Appendix

"persevere" in its fullness in the unrepresentable darkness, the light of (partial) representation is still capable of gesturing at and invoking it *via negativa*. Further, the "others" waited for by the "lemon-rind light" also refer to what have been listed in the lines following the reference to Vermeer:

> ...the broken eucalyptus
> leaf, still sharply smelling of turpentine,
> the breadfruit's foliage, rust-edged like van Ruysdael.
> The Dutch blood in me is drawn to detail. (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 27)

As summarized in the last line, Walcott is drawn to the minutest details. These highly detailed representation of the leaves complement the "lemon-rind light" and together they form an example of what the poet sees as the perfect subject for his work: "What work lies ahead of us, what sunlight for generations!—" The highly detailed, close-up descriptions of the leaves suggest an extremely close point of observation, which seems to recall the earlier moment when the poet envisioned himself observing, from the eyes of the cicada, the "[d]ays thick as leaves, close to each as hours". The cicada-poet reference thus underlies these lines. In fact, the description of the leaves as "still sharply smelling of turpentine" already exceeds the limit of the visual, suggesting that these lines, once more, are examples of poetic lines. In this way, through the mediation of paintings and painters, Walcott's meditates the limitations and possibilities of poetic representation.

Last but not least, the selected details, re-conceived and re-organized in

ways examined before, allow poetic representations to be politically empowering. The descriptions of the leaves, the dew drop reflecting the object world, all consist of exquisitely represented details. In a way these lines could be read as examples through which Walcott defines his version of "realism". Walcott admits in his own line: "The Dutch blood in me is drawn to detail." This "realism", presumably, was what Walcott was thinking of when he said in the Abodunrin interview: "I don't do abstract painting; I don't believe in it". Terada notes Walcott's fascination with the image of the dewdrop: "[t]he image of the droplet haunts Walcott's poetry", citing similar images from several of Walcott's poems besides Poem XVII (Terada, 132-3). As shown in earlier discussions, the image of the dewdrop serves as a metaphor about representation itself. I have discussed the way in which the dewdrop exemplifies the transience and inadequacy of representation as compared to the dynamics and permanent fluctuations of the real world. This metaphor, however, works on yet another level, where Walcott negotiates the tension between "representation" and "reality"; or as Terada puts it in another way, between "figuration" and "verisimilitude" (Terada, 133). When Walcott mistook the dewdrop for real, he confused the "world" reflected in it with the world he inhabited. In a sense, what he saw was at least a double representation: the representation (the image of the dewdrop) of a representation (the "world" reflected in the "dewdrop"). The situation would be further complicated should one consider the chain of representations in its entirety: the world which the Flemish painter inhabited was

reflected (represented) in the dewdrop, which was painted (represented) by the painter, whose painting was reproduced (represented) in the book where Walcott saw it. The dewdrop creates the illusion of reflecting a world which it does not represent; and on the other hand the world it does seem to reflect is one long lost in the chain of representations. The dewdrop thus questions through this chain of representations the nature of a problematic notion of "reality", which seems to have become the mystery in the core of a Russian nesting doll. Walcott meditates on the issue of "reality" in another poem which is similar to Poem XVII in many ways—"A Map of Europe". In this poem Walcott also uses the contrasting images of light and darkness; and similarly, the light is presented as falling on certain objects which are otherwise left unilluminated in the dark:

> The light creates its stillness. In its ring
> Everything IS. A cracked coffee cup,
> A broken loaf, a dented urn become
> Themselves, as in Chardin,
> Or in beer-bright Vermeer,
> Not objects of our pity.
>
> In it is no *lacrimae rerum*[22],
> No art. Only the gift
> To see things as they are, halved by a darkness
> From which they cannot shift. (Walcott, *Collected Poems*, 66)

The light is understood as possessing transformative power, which makes the

[22] *Lacrimae rerum* (tears of things) comes from line 462 of Book I of Virgil's *The Aeneid*. When Aeneas looks at the murals depicting the Trojan War, he says: "sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangent" (These are the tears of things, and our mortality cuts to the heart). (Translation URL: http://www.special-dictionary.com/latin/s/sunt_lacrimae_rerum_et_mentem_mortalia_tangunt.htm)

things it shines upon come into being—"become themselves". But light at the same time transfixes its subjects into "stillness". "Everything IS" conveys the sense of a frozen vividness/liveliness, which reminds the poet of paintings by, understandably, Vermeer, but more importantly here, the 18th century French painter Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, who was known for his mastery of still life[23]. Using usually simple kitchen utensils or domestic wares as his subjects, his was able to achieve "an uncannily realistic texture" with his "subdued colour and mellow lighting"[24]. Yet the idea that light transforms objects into being by falling upon them begs the question: what was the status of the objects before they were illuminated? One may fall back with this question on the notion of "persevering in darkness". This move must recognize the existence of the objects as the dark "others" which, only when illuminated, would cross from the "other" side to "become" subjects for representation. These lines, however, convey an even stronger sense of genesis[25] with words like "create", "IS" (being), and "become". The impression is that the objects were in a state of non-existence before they were illuminated and transfixed in the light. Terada understands this transformation as both a coming-into-being and a moving-away from being: "Objects must undergo as much transformation to 'become / themselves' as to *become other*." [italics mine] (Terada, 130) The emphasis, though, is not on the separation or contradiction between the two moves, but on

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[23] See Appendix

[24] For more details, see the entry on Chardin on WebMuseum, URL: http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/chardin/

[25] I use "genesis" not so much in its religious sense as in the ontological sense: the coming-into-being of things .

the two being one and the same move. This is because the objects only "become / themselves" by being perceived through previous/existing representations in, for example, Chardin, Vermeer, or others. Thus "existence", and the notion of "reality" based on it, is destabilized and in a sense dissolves into the chain of representations. Thus in the ending of the poem Walcott welds together two separate notions: 1) "things as they are" (commonly understood as beings in the real object world, or "reality"), and 2) "art" (painting on the canvas) —"To see things as they are, halved by a darkness / From which they cannot shift." Equating "things as they are" with "art", Walcott reveals "reality" as fictive, and cancels its assumed priority over 'art' or representation in general. Further, the "gift / To see"—the artistic vision or representation itself—is no longer the fateful one step away from "reality", but has become what steps into "reality". As Terada notes, "'Art' and 'things' and 'the gift / To see' now oppose, now enclose each other, resisting our desire to string them into a familiar formula ('the gift / To see' + 'things' = 'art')." (Terada, 131). "Reality", and related to it the "origin" or "source" of representation, become problematic notions themselves, superseded by (the chain of) representation.

However I don't think Walcott is proposing any form of ontological or epistemological agnosticism. The phrase "things as they are" could have multiple meanings. Although it carries the common implication of "things as they exist in reality", the phrase, especially when read together with "To see", does not lay so much claim on "reality" as on a neutral notion of "the state in

which things exist (be)". "To see things as they are", therefore, is a form of perception: to examine the state in which things exist. In this sense, while Walcott takes on the notion of "reality", he calls into question the "reality" as perceived, instead of the absolute reality that perhaps exists beyond the scope of human perception. A somewhat crude way to differentiate the two ideas of "reality" might be to invoke the Platonic model: the former could be termed "reality", the latter "Reality". The emphasis, however, unlike in Plato, is on the "reality", or for that matter "realities", as perceived in human experience. Walcott is not interested in the ascent to any absolute, neutral or objective "Reality" that may or may not exist anyway. The reason that "reality" is fictive or figurative is that: however or whatever the realm of Reality may be, its manifestation to human experience must be structured in and by perception, into all forms of "realities". In other words, the immediate "reality" perceivable is already the product of a fundamental primary representation, and thus could only be figurative/fictive—approaching verisimilitude at best. The realm of "Reality" is the unknowable, dark, "other" side, screened out by human perception—just like the objects in the still life halved by the canvass. The inability of the still life to move away from the canvass—"a darkness / From which they cannot shift"—is ultimately our own inability to move beyond the limits of human perception. Such a view on "reality" and the perception of it, no doubt, is a highly modernist one. In fact, such a modernist preoccupation underlies many of Walcott's aesthetic and philosophical meditations. The

questioning of the nature of "reality" necessarily raises further questions about the nature of its representation—and thus about artistic representation in general. More interestingly, Walcott's use of the phrase "things as they are" further situates him among other modernist artists and their discussions on the issue. The phrase itself is a likely reference to Wallace Stevens' "The Man with the Blue Guitar" which, in turn, was very probably inspired by Picasso's "Blue Period" painting *The Old Guitarist*. Stevens' poem raises very similar questions about artistic/poetic representation

> The man bent over his guitar,
> A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.
>
> They said, "You have a blue guitar,
> You do not play things as they are."
>
> The man replied, "Things as they are
> Are changed upon the blue guitar."
>
> And they said to him, "But play, you must,
> A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,
>
> A tune upon the blue guitar,
> Of things exactly as they are." (Stevens)

Walcott's poem, therefore, responds to Steven's, using a different metaphor for artistic perception/representation—while Stevens uses music (tune), Walcott refers to painting (esp. still life). The "dark other side" of "Reality", as discussed before, "perseveres" on its own, in the same way as the Stevens' "tune beyond us" which is "yet ourselves" and "[o]f things exactly as they are". While in

Walcott the "light" of representation/perception falls upon the "darkness", the illuminated part "becomes" what they are—"themselves"—as the manifested "reality" in human experience; in Stevens' the guitarist recognizes that "Things as they are / Are changed upon the blue guitar". As Terada notes, "[p]erception encompasses transformation" (Terada, 130), things perceived are transformed from the unknown, fluctuating "other" state into the tangible existence of "themselves". The reference to painting in the final lines serves both as a metaphor about perceived/represented "reality" as well as its frame of reference—"reality" as perceived, is no more real than a painting—still life in particular: both are forms of representations. Hence, the perceived, flawed "reality"—the "cracked coffee cup, / A broken loaf, a dented urn"—through Chardin or Vermeer, is presented as a factual statement about the nature of "reality": they are just things "[t]hemselves", and are neither "*lacrimae rerum*", nor "art"—"In it is no *lacrimae rerum*, / No art." The attitude towards the fictive/figurative nature of "reality" is a neutral and composed one. Not seeing the flawed "reality" as "objects of our pity" means not lamenting over it as corrupted/destroyed by representation ("*lacrimae rerum*") nor attempting to glorify or perfect it through techniques ("No art"). A final note here is, although the Platonic differentiation between "reality" and "Reality" helps clarify Walcott's take on the issue of representation, it does not necessarily mean that Walcott himself consciously meditates in these terms. It is not exactly clear how or what he takes that ultimate absolute "Reality" to be, since he mainly discusses the issue through poetic and figurative language, especially with the general light-darkness metaphor. In any case, it is at least safe to say that Walcott frequently invokes this external domain as generally dark and vague, and tends to summarize it under the general term "the other".

CHAPTER III

WORKING THROUGH AND AGAINST REPRESENTATION: THE VISUAL-VERBAL SYNERGY AS AN EMPOWERING STRATEGY

In the previous chapter I have analyzed the ways through which Walcott strategically shifts his burden of "faithful" representation of the Caribbean onto representation itself, especially by pointing out its own flaws and limits. But this move still does not answer the pressing demand from Walcott's responsibility as a Caribbean writer. His poetic meditation through the visual art on multiple levels, and his recognition of the nature of representation and "reality" have thus prepared the ground for his further poetic moves. In the following sections, I will focus on the two major approaches with which Walcott undermines colonial representation of the Caribbean. First, his poems bear witness to the misrepresentations of the Caribbean; and second, the poems work through and against such misrepresentations by strategically employing the trope of "ekphrasis".

Walcott continually notes and dramatizes the problem of misrepresentation in both his essays and poetry: the misrepresentation of the Caribbean, the misconception of and the lack of interest in the real Caribbean experience. The problem has been a historical one, dating back to the early explorers' accounts of the region; as well as a lasting one, sustained by the state-sponsored tourist industry. Walcott has often cited as his target the accounts of the Caribbean region by the 19th century English historian James Anthony Froude. In his book

The English in the West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses, Froude made the famous but later widely criticized remark about the Caribbean:

> There has been romance, but it has been the romance of pirates and outlaws. The natural graces of life do not show themselves under such conditions. There has been no saint in the West Indies since Las Casas, no hero unless philo-Negro enthusiasm can make one out of Toussaint. There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own. (Froude, 306)

For Walcott, this point of view has always been the foundation of the misrepresentation and misconception of the Caribbean, and he is constantly on the look out for modes of thinking under its influence[26]. He critiques Froude's view in his Nobel lecture, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory":

> There was this conviction in Froude that since History is based on achievement, and since the history of the Antilles was so genetically corrupt, so depressing in its cycles of massacres, slavery, and indenture, a culture was inconceivable and nothing could ever be created in those ramshackle ports, those monotonously feudal sugar estates. (Walcott, "Antilles")

Similarly, in his earlier essay "What the Twilight Says" he quotes the entire passage from Froude (without the need to name the author, given the notoriety of the remark) as the typical example of a form of "tawdry history" (or historical view) which plagues the Caribbean, especially the Caribbean intellectuals and artists. Walcott's wording here is harsh and antagonistic:

> The future of West Indian militancy lies in art. All revolutions begin

[26] In "The Antilles" Walcott makes a similar note—"History can alter the eye and the moving hand to conform a view of itself; it can rename places for the nostalgia in an echo; it can temper the glare of tropical light to elegiac monotony in prose, the tone of judgement in Conrad, in the travel journals of Trollope."

> amateurishly, with forged or stolen weapons, but the West Indian artist knew the need for revolt without knowing what weapons to use…there was in the sullen ambition of the West Indian actor a fear that he lacked proper weapons, that his voice, colour, and body were no match for the civilized concepts of theatre. This is an endemic evil that cannot be dissolved by professional hatred or by bitter flaunting of his race. In his encounter with a tawdry history he was shaken by judgements of this sort. (Walcott, *WTS*, 16)

While intellectuals and artists suffer from such a "tawdry history", its aftershocks still affect the much larger Caribbean population. The misconception and misrepresentation are carried on and sustained by an economic necessity—tourism. In "The Antilles", Walcott invokes Froude's remark again in his comment on the psychology of tourism:

> [V]isitors to the Caribbean must feel that they are inhabiting a succession of postcards. Both climates are shaped by what we have read of them. For tourists, the sunshine cannot be serious. Winter adds depth and darkness to life as well as to literature, and in the unending summer of the tropics not even poverty or poetry (in the Antilles poverty is poetry with a V, une vie, a condition of life as well as of imagination) seems capable of being profound because the nature around it is so exultant, so resolutely ecstatic, like its music. A culture based on joy is bound to be shallow. Sadly, to sell itself, the Caribbean encourages the delights of mindlessness, of brilliant vacuity, as a place to flee not only winter but that seriousness that comes only out of culture with four seasons. So how can there be a people there, in the true sense of the word? (Walcott, "Antilles")

"Postcards" is the typical embodiment of the misrepresentation of the Caribbean.

Coincidentally or not, while Krista Thompson has documented the history of visual representation since the nineteenth century of the Caribbean as a tropical paradise in the postcards, as well as the reactions of the local habitants towards such depictions, Walcott has used in *Omeros* exactly the same image in his critique of the impacts of tourism on St. Lucia."Their past was flat as a post-card, and their future, / a brighter and flatter post-card, printed the schemes / of charters with their poverty guaranteed tour" (*Omeros*, 57). Natalie Melas reads the St. Lucia in these lines as a place that has "become display, totally visible, detachable, transportable. Where there ought to be the density of historical memory, there is someone else's souvenir" (Melas, 152). Melas has the acuity to capture with the word "display" that strong sense of objectification which tourism has exercised on the land and its people, transforming culture into exotic objects and "souvenirs". Presumably these post-cards are not all products of western tourist industries, and are at least partly made by local travel agencies to attract tourists. Thus the local context of cultural representation has changed since the time documented in Thompsons's book—from resistance to a kind of complicity: hence the word "schemes". Further, although the line "...charters with their poverty guaranteed tour" is open to different interpretations, it is helpful to mention at least one obvious reading: that the major "attraction" (for western tourists) is the poverty of the land and its people. The underlying logic—or "scheme"—is disturbing, since it means the continuation and sustenance of this state of poverty (real or feigned) for the "depropriating gaze"

that has deprived the land and the people of their life and rendered them "on the brink of forgettability" (Melas, 152).

The "postcard" view of the Caribbean is one frequently featured theme in Walcott's poetry too. One good example would be "Poem IV" from *Midsummer*, in which Walcott offers a picturesque view of a Spanish port (Port of Spain?) rendered in painterly descriptions. It depicts the changing views of Port of Spain throughout a day, through which Walcott reflects on the issue of de-/colonization in the name of degeneration/civilization. The poem opens by offering a rather unpleasant view of the Spanish port, presumably early in the morning:

> This Spanish port, piratical in diverseness,
> with its one-eyed lighthouse, this damned sea of noise,
> this ocher harbor, mantled by its own scum,
> offers, from white wrought-iron balconies,
> the nineteenth-century view. (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 14)

Despite the rather abstract and general descriptions such as "piratical", "damned" or "noise", there are actually very few concrete images that the reader's imagination may cling to. It is important to notice that the speaker is deliberately reminding the reader of the "Spanishness" and the "nineteenth-century-ness" of the scene by pointing them out both in the beginning and at the end of the description. In a way, it is as if the speaker is painting, with words, a landscape picture titled "A Nineteenth-century Spanish Port".

Immediately following this offensive picture of a suffocating sense of stasis,

is a quick change in the temporal consciousness—instead of looking at a port that seems to have remained the same for at least a century long, "You can watch it become / more African *hourly*". The stasis of the opening scene is diluted by a sense of fast changes taking place:

> —crusted roofs, hot as skillets
> peppered with cries; between fast-fry wagons,
> floating seraphic Muslims connot make it hush.
> By the pitch of noon, the one thing wanting
> is a paddle-wheeler with its rusty parrot's scream,
> whistling in to be warped, and Mr. Kurtz on the landing.
> Stay on the right bank in the imperial dream—
> the Thames, not the Congo. (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 14)

This second scene of the port, different from the somewhat hazy, abstract, and quite impressionistic rendering of the first scene (with abstract description), is much more realistic and meticulous. The reader/viewer can get a sense of the temperature of the place; discern the exact type of the wagons and the ethnicity of the people in the view; and all the time the busy, bustling noises of the port is audible. There is a flowing sense of the changing of the time of day in the scene. On the other hand, however, there seems also palpable a sense of regularity, especially when it comes to the expectation of the whistles of the paddle-wheeler towards the pitch of noon.

Despite the liveliness of the scene, however, there seems to have been little feeling of the "African-ness" about it that the speaker has promised—until the moment when the figure of Mr. Kurtz is mentioned. Through the allusion to

Heart of Darkness, the image of the jungle along the river Congo is merged with the scene of the port. It is in this vision that the speaker reflects on the consequences of the "imperial dream" and arrives at the admonition:

> Stay on the *right* bank in the imperial dream—
> the Thames, not the Congo. From the small-island masts
> of the schooner basin to the plate-glass fronts
> of the Holiday Inn is one step, and from need to greed
> through the river of clogged, circling traffic is
> a few steps more. [Italics mine] (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 14)

The word "right" here is an obvious pun, warning against the colonial desires whose "greed" easily exceeds the restraints and boundaries of its proclaimed "need". On the other hand, as shown by the line "The world had no time to change / to a doorman's braid from the loincloths of Africa", the speaker recognizes that the "developments" brought to the colonized regions are hardly what is most needed in those places. These regions, rather than benefiting from true developments, actually suffer from a regression. This recognition echoes the speaker's earlier vision of Port of Spain becoming "more African hourly", and is further supported by the image of the "cloaked wind, bend like a scavenger, rakes the trash / in the gutters." The vision of the degenerating jungle-city is finally completed with the bleak finishing lines:

> It is hard not to see the past's
> vision of lampposts branching over streets of bush,
> the plazas cracked by the jungle's furious seed. (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 14)

The phrase "past's / vision" echoes the earlier "imperial dream". But on the

other hand Walcott also criticizes the Caribbean for its complicity in constructing such postcard views of the land. The reference to "Holiday Inn" raises the issue of exploitation of the Caribbean experience by tourism; hence the phrase "from need to greed"—Walcott recognizes the necessity of developing the tourist industry for the economy of the Caribbean, but also warns against its impact. The "imperial dream" or "past's vision" therefore, is what has been shared by both the European colonizers and the Caribbean subjects.

For Walcott, the greatest evil of views like Froude's is that they smuggle into the Caribbean psyche some confidence-shaking, debilitating implications of cultural superiority/inferiority. Tourism, too, though an economic necessity, is also frequently exploitative and, as Walcott remarks in his interview, this easily leads to a form of embarrassing "benign slavery" (Stanford, 3:30), which not only allows for the misconception and misrepresentation of the Caribbean, but also encourages and caters to the image of the Caribbean as the carefree tropical paradise, a backyard garden for Europe. He quotes from Sartre's introduction to Fanon: "The status of native is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonised people *with their consent*"; and "the new black", Walcott observes, "continues that condition." (Walcott, *WTS*, 18) Willingly or not, the Caribbean people often become complicit in the misconception and misrepresentation of themselves. On the other hand, intellectuals and artists, though perceiving this, are often lost, in their search for identity, in some rootless-ness and cultural disorientation, resorting in the end to either a cultural

nostalgia, or forms of naïve or strident nationalism.

Problematic (indeed dangerous) views like Froude's and their detrimental impact on the Caribbean are frequently brought up in Walcott's poems as targets for irony and subversion, usually through a series of images in extended metaphors. Poem I from *Midsummer* is a typical example. This poem contains one of Walcott's most frequently explored metaphors: "world-as-text". The textualization of landscape serves as a strategic re-encoding of the otherwise unapproachable landscape constituted in and as the visual "other", into Walcott's more familiar, workable semiotic system of the words, allowing him more freedom to negotiate and maneuver between different views and representations of the Caribbean.

Poem I is structured in the extended metaphor which compares the Caribbean landscape (with the sky, clouds, sea and creatures) to a texts (books, records, poetry, etc.). The metaphor is perceivable from the very first line:

> The jet bores like a silverfish through *volumes* of cloud—
> clouds that will keep no *record* of where we have passed,
> nor the sea's mirror, nor the coral busy with its own
> culture, they aren't doors of dissolving stone,
> but *pages* in a damp culture that come apart.
> So a hole in their *parchment* opens… [italics mine] (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 11)

Words like "record" and "parchment" associate the objects of landscape—clouds (and perhaps also the sea and the coral)—with historical records and documents—possibly including various notes from geographical explorations,

travel logs or diaries, etc. The image of historical records makes more sense when read into the surface meaning of the first few lines, which depict the view outside the window while the plane is flying into and out of the clouds. Such flying experience is common to many readers and is easy to relate to—while flying among clouds over the ocean, most of the time one sees only the clouds, with occasional views of patches of the sea down below here and there. The lack of frame of reference easily leads to a sense of disorientation—a feeling of being "in the middle of nowhere", or in unfamiliar territory between known places. By associating this experience with history writing, the poet envisions himself as both travelling in the Caribbean landscape and travelling in its "written histories". The metaphor comparing the clouds to volumes of historical records (parchments) thus constitutes a comment on "written histories" as capable of creating a sense of cultural-historical disorientation. It is interesting to observe that these opening lines are followed immediately by the mentioning of Anthony Trollope and James Anthony Froude:

> ...in a vast
> dereliction of sunlight, there's that island known
> to the traveller Trollope, and the fellow traveller Froude,
> for making nothing. Not even a people. (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 11)

The allusion again includes Froude's remark that there are "no people [in the West Indies] in the true sense of the word" (Froude, 306). The history written by people such as Trollope and Froude, for a long time, had represented the Caribbean as a *tabula rasa*, justifying colonization in the name of civilization.

Reflecting on this, the poet feels that the "clouds…will keep no record of where we have passed". The line thus raises the issue of the standards and definition of "history", as it reacts to Froude's remark:

> It is strange to think how chequered a history these islands have had, how far they are even yet from any condition which promises permanence. Not one of them has arrived at any stable independence. (Froude, 305)

Yet more detrimental is such a cultural-historical view's impact on the Caribbean psyche and its internalization. The poet's feeling that there is no record of where he has passed is extended into a collective experience by the plural pronoun "we", which refers to not only the people onboard the plane but also, by association, to the Caribbean people. Thus the line recalls the common Caribbean mentality described in "What the Twilight Says":

> [W]e have not wholly sunk into our own landscapes, as one gets the feeling at funerals that our bodies make only light, unlasting impressions on our earth. It is not an earth that has been fed long with the mulch of cultures, with the cycles of tribalism, feudalism, monarchy, democracy, industrialization. … Everything is immediate, and this immediacy means overbreeding, illegitimacy, migration without remorse. The sprout stuck in the soil. The depth of being rooted is related to the shallowness of racial despair. The migratory West Indian feels rootless on his own earth, chafing at its beaches. (Walcott, *WTS*, 18-9)

Walcott observes that the European standards and definition for terms like "culture", "civilization", or "history" have been smuggled into the Caribbean psyche. Thus in the sway of a "Comptean passion" as Levine terms it (Levine,

48), the "histories" written of the Caribbean represent it as lacking a history—for its "lack" of tangible "civilization" and "culture". The clouds close behind the jet plane, erasing the traces of its passing, just like the "written histories" erase the Caribbean from the atlas of human civilization. Through this line Walcott reflects upon "history" as a seamless, stable and closed system which excludes Caribbean participation in its compilation.

On the other hand, while exposing such misrepresentations and misconceptions, Walcott's understandings of the Caribbean situation and experience also make him aware of his own difficulties in producing any faithful representations. I have earlier discussed how he meditates on the intrinsic inadequacy of representation itself, but what even further distances him from his ideal task is still his recognition of his own distance from his land and the people. The anxiety of alienation from the island's life as well as the eagerness to relate to and represent it figure strongly in one of Walcott's earlier poems, "Sainte Lucie" from *Sea Grapes* (1976).

The poem opens with Part I describing a common scene in a certain typical St. Lucian fishing village. The poet's observing eye roams in every direction—over the "shack that is shuttered / with warped boards, with rust" which functions as the church, the "crabs crawling under the house-shadow", "the children", "a net rotting among cans", the "sunlight trolling the shallows", the "stunned amethystine sea", the "pelican", "seagulls", and "dolphins", etc. The description also attempts to encompass the village life of a whole day (or

perhaps an entire afternoon). The poem opens with the poet noticing the church bell caved in the shack/church, presumably by hearing it ring. The time of the day could be either the morning or midday; towards the middle of the section the poet mentions "the far bell" at noon again; and at the end of the section, the last two lines close as "that / should have rounded the day". What is most striking about Part I, however, is that all these observations are streamed into a single sentence which expands into the entire twenty-three lines of this section[27]. The unceasing flow of the sentence grows increasingly stressful as it bears its own load. Its basic sentence structure, and along with it its thematic "centre of mass", are lost in the loosely bundled details. The poet finishes the section and his description of the village life with a vague reference to "that" which "should have rounded the day". Presumably "that" refers to all the details that have been presented in the previous lines; yet just as the line's subjunctive mood suggests, all the details that have been presented, detailed yet only skin-deep, are neither enough to "round the day" nor adequate to capture the essence of the village life. Thus the eagerly observing poet still feels somewhat frustrated by his lack of real touch on the island's people and their life, as he complains: "from these I am growing no nearer / to what secret eluded the children / under the house-shade". The "secret" that the poet fails to crack, in fact, eludes not the children but the poet himself; thus he feels "something always being missed / between the floating shadow and the pelican". The "secret" of the island's life is

[27] See Appendix II

closed to the poet, and the feeling of things being missed in the landscape may well be the external projection of his own sense of loss—his losing touch with the island life.

This feeling of being out-of-touch is strengthened in Part II of the poem, which launches a short-lined, rhythmic chanting about the fruit's names. The list of names given is a mix of English and Creole, with English filling the gaps of the Creole where the poet forgets the native names: "Pomme arac, / otaheite apple, / pomme cythère, / pomme granate, / moubain, / z'anananas…" Glossing over these names, the poet discovers that his native tongue has grown somewhat rusty, as he seems to have forgotten some of the fruits' names, remembering only their English counterparts: "pomme, / I have forgotten / what pomme for / the Irish potato…" Thus in a struggle to connect to his native land, the poet tries to invoke the language he has forgotten: "Come back to me, / my language. / Come back", as if he was trying to conjure up phantoms from a lost past. On the other hand, the people have also grown unfamiliar with the poet, as they ask:

> "Oh, so you is Walcott?
> you is Roddy brother?
> Teacher Alix son?" (Walcott, *Collected*, 312)

There is a lack of direct connection between the poet and his people, as they seem to only know/remember him through his other family relations. Though this might be a mere dramatization, it does indicate the poet's strong sense of being out-of-touch with his land and people. Moreover, the dramatization of this alienation serves to highlight the problem underlying it. The lines therefore not

only expose Walcott's distance from his poetic subject, but also suggest that the poet himself is aware of such alienation. Similarly, the ending lines of Part I also enacts such a self-reflexive moment with their subjunctive mood: "that / should have rounded the day". While the poet reflects upon his distance from his subjects, his lines also reflect upon their inadequacy to represent the subjects.

Through such self-reflexivity the poem becomes more than a failed attempt to faithfully represent the Caribbean landscape and people. While it consciously reflects upon its failure, it succeeds in exposing and exemplifying failed representations. In other words, what Walcott aims to do with this poem is not so much to faithfully represent his subjects, but to bear witness to misrepresentations of them. The focus is not on the Caribbean, but on poetics and (mis-)representation in general. Read this way, the observing eye in Part I which only scratches the surface of the Caribbean village life may also be the eye of just any tourist, who would not want to venture deeper than the mere surface. The single sentence that keeps running throughout the entire section conveys a sense of stress and urgency similar to what the sightseeing tourist might feel under crowded touring plans, who would want to cram as many scenes into the camera as possible within the given length of time. The voracious observing eye in the single sentence thus resembles the lens of a video camera; and both in a way recall the image of the "dewdrop" discussed earlier, which seeks to encompass everything within its own transience and limited scope. With this section, then, Walcott enacts and bears witness to the common

misrepresentation of the Caribbean in tourism[28].

While Part I deals with shallow conceptions and representations, the following parts seem to progress deeper and experiment with different ways of approaching the Caribbean experience. Part II tries to invoke the native language and late turns into another collage of natural sceneries and people. The descriptions are heavily mediated, often metaphorical, and frequently merge into meditative trains of thoughts. For example, the poet describes the evening scene[29]. The opening lines of this stanza— "Evening opens at / a text of fireflies"—literally "open" it as a "text of fireflies", with words free-floating in loose associations and wordplay. The entire stanza constitutes a textualization of the landscape—a familiar move in Walcott—which is echoed in the next stanza by a hint of another way of conceiving the Caribbean landscape typical of Walcott:

> In the empty schoolyard
> teacher dead today
> the fruit rotting
> yellow on the ground,
> dyes from Gauguin
> the pomme arac dyes
> the earth purple,
> the ochre roads
> still waiting in the sun
> for my shadow… (Walcott, *Collected*, 312)

[28] Besides tourism, Walcott could also be reacting to the earlier naïve celebration of the landscape and common life by earlier Caribbean writers who lacked recognitions of the complexities and ambiguities of the Caribbean situation. (see Victor Chang, 242)
[29] See Appendix II

Rather than direct representations of the landscape, the lines exemplify the poet's perception of it as mediated through his own familiar "vocabulary"—painting and poetry. Yet such a representation, though rendered more familiar and graspable, is marked by its distance from the Caribbean reality. The same happens in Part V of the poem when the poet's observing eye finally falls upon himself, addressing himself in the second person:

> after all that,
> your faith like a canoe at evening coming in,
> like a relative who is tired of America,
> like a woman coming back to your house,
>
> that sang in the ropes of your wrist
> when you lifted this up;
> so that, from time to time, on Sundays
>
> between adorations, one might see,
> if one were there, and not there,
> looking in at the windows
>
> the real faces of angels. (Walcott, *Collected*, 322-3)

The lines sum up the poem with the poet's strong sense of spiritual homecoming much deeper than his physical homecoming in Part I.

However, despite the poet's passionate gesture to reach out to the essence of the land and his affectionate embracement of the people, the sense of home, the spiritual connections, the "real faces of angels" are still built upon make-belief, not too different from the earlier moment when the poet had to resort to his

thwarted imagination:

> It is signed with music.
> It turns the whole island.
> You have to imagine it empty on a Sunday afternoon
> Between adorations
> Nobody can see it and it is there,
> nobody adores the two who could be Eve and Adam dancing. (Walcott, *Collected*, 320-1)

The "real faces of angels" in the last line contrasts with the "dancing" performers of "Eve and Adam", and the emphasis on true spiritual connections achieved in the end is certainly appreciable. Yet while trying hard in this poem to reach out to his native land, the poet's tropes for the landscape and people seem a bit too studied with their forced effort to aestheticize the subject through textualization and European paintings. Even the concluding line about "the real faces of angels" sounds somewhat over the top, especially when considered in its context: the statements are made "[a]fter so many bottles of white rum in a pile" (Walcott, *Collected*, 322). While the tropes and figures may aptly express the poet's passion for and his way of seeing his land and people, they also distance the poet from his subjects. In other words, what the poem bears witness to is the poet's passion for his subject on the one hand, and the gap created between them by his poetics on the other. As Walcott himself admits in 1973:

> What I wrote had nothing to do with what I saw. While I honoured and loved them in my mind, I could not bring myself to write down the names of villages, of fruits, in the way people spoke because it seemed too raw . . . And I found no lines that mentioned breadfruit, guava,

plantain, cassava in literature. (Walcott qtd. in Warner-Lewis, 27)

While three years later Walcott did come to write down the "names" of his land, people and fruits, the paradox and the tension within his works between his poetics and his poetic subjects have always remained. Thus through witnessing and enacting the gap between the Caribbean experience and its representation, Walcott's poems not only expose common misrepresentations and misconceptions of the region, but also reflect on the tensions between the aesthetics and politics of his poetics, as well as the value of his poetry therefore. As Gray notes, "Walcott's artistry has long been a subject of Walcott's artistry." (Gray, 125) Commenting on the passage in *Omeros* where the poet is led through hell and encounters the "selfish phantoms" of his fellow poets, Gray again points out the haunting problem of representation underlying Walcott's self-reflexive poems:

> The writing of the poem is continually imbued with the sense of the vanity of writing the poem. … The aesthete, the watercolorist, the poet who delights in surfaces, whether of his fellow poets' work or of the sea-wrack and sea-grapes that are strewn into his poems, cannot stop puzzling over that artistry, constantly questioning its relation to social pressure and hungers that the world cries out for him, he thinks, to represent. (Gray, 125)

The tension Gray highlights here is in nature the same as the one between the demand and impossibilities of faithful representation discussed earlier. As I suggested in the beginning of this chapter, besides bearing witness to and reflecting on the misrepresentation and misconception of the Caribbean,

Walcott's next strategy to address the conflicting issues he faces is to work *against* various politically-motivated representations by working *through* them, and especially by mobilizing the potentials of visual-verbal crossings at his typical ekphrastic moments.

The aforementioned Poem I from *Midsummer* exemplifies such an underlying strategy of "working through and against representation". In previous discussions I have studied the "world-as-text" trope in Poem I as a way to bear witness to the impairing "written histories" of the Caribbean. However, the trope in fact serves Walcott's double purposes. As I will discuss in the following analysis, while this trope embodies the misrepresentation and misconception of the Caribbean, it also provides the ground for Walcott's strategic reversal of such problematic views.

In this poem, viewing the "clouds" as "volumes" of history that "keeps no record" of the Caribbean's passing, the poet also emphasizes the possibilities available to the Caribbean. The jet travelling through clouds is likened to the fish swimming in the sea—"The jet bores like a silverfish through volumes of cloud". The line is echoed later by a similar metaphor: "The jet's shadow / ripples over green jungles as steadily as a minnow / through seaweed." The images of the "silverfish" or "minnow" convey a strong sense of liveliness and agility, as opposed to the bewildering and disorienting historical documents. This complicates the image of "record" by setting a contrast between the fresh, lively and immediate experiences of the Caribbean and the dead, historical, and

politically-motivated/mediated archive. Despite the account of Trollope and Froude, the poet recognizes the uniqueness of the Caribbean and regards the land (the sea and the coral) as "pages of a damp culture" that, as the plane glides over them, "come apart" to reveal themselves like the pages of a book. The strong presence of water also strengthens the "liveliness" of the Caribbean experience by introducing the tactile sense into the formerly pure visual images. The poet sees the unique Caribbean experience as exceeding the limits of dry "written histories": "So a hole in their parchment opens, and suddenly, in a vast / dereliction of sunlight, there's that island…"

The compound metaphor of the book in the opening lines is echoed in the latter part of the poem:

> Near the rusty harbor
> around Port of Spain bright suburbs fade into *words*—
> Maraval, Diego Martin—the highways long as regrets,
> and steeples so tiny you couldn't hear their bells,
> nor the sharp *exclamations* of whitewashed minarets
> from green villages. The lowering window resounds
> over *pages* of earth, the canefields set in *stanzas*.
> Skimming over an ocher swamp like a fast cloud of egrets
> are *nouns* that find their branches as simply as birds. [italics mine]
> (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 11)

As the plane glides over vast landscape, the poet imagines the stretches of land to be pages of a book on which poetry is written; the formation of patches of sugarcane fields on the land is likened to the stanzas of poems on the pages. The lines that combine the image of egrets flying over the swamp and the idea of

"nouns" envision the birds as nouns which fall into places in the poem, by themselves, smoothly and seemingly effortlessly, thus taking the metaphor further, from viewing the land as poetry to viewing the land in liveliness and motion as a form of poetry writing. The tendency towards immediacy and movement conveyed earlier through "silverfish" and "minnow" is sustained by the vision of the land as (capable of) taking on its own initiative to write its own poetry. Now the land is no longer Trollope and Froude's wasteland in disorder, but is a piece of land shone by the same sunlight that shines on great cities like Rome—"Our sunlight is shared by Rome and your white paper, Joseph". The reference is to Conrad, and the poet's stress on the "white paper" seems a general ironic reference to *Heart of Darkness* as a work with "black" words written on "white" paper. Thus the poet sees the Caribbean as possessing the will and energy to live its own life, write its own history, compose its poetry, and takes on a legitimacy of its own—"a world that still stands"(Walcott, *Midsummer*, 11). In this way the poet turns the "world-as-text" metaphor against itself, by dividing it into two separate ideas: "histories written of" the Caribbean, and "poetry being written by" the Caribbean. Working "through and against" the "world-as-text" metaphor, Walcott subverts the misrepresentation of the Caribbean with his own version of "misrepresentation". Not claiming to boast any fictive "faithfulness", he nevertheless presents his "misrepresentation" as more enlightened and empowering.

Gray notes that the "mutual enfiguring of nature and language constitutes at

once an irreferential play, an inquiry into the relation between 'reality' and representation" (Gray, 119). The questioning of the fictive notion of "reality", as I have discussed in detail in the previous chapter, helps Walcott to further challenge the politically-motivated misrepresentation of the Caribbean. The figure of the landscape as written histories highlights the fictive nature of the common images of the Caribbean as products of misrepresentation; and the envisioning of the landscape as poetry being written works against and overturns such misrepresentation with its own weapon. Thus the frequently used trope of "world-as-text" works as part of Walcott's general strategy to deal with problematic representations. Given the fictive nature of "reality", the "world-as-text" trope could in fact be understood as a form of ekphrasis, since it is the verbal representation of the "landscape"—a visual representation itself. Enacting such visual-verbal crossings, Walcott is able to work on the otherwise untouchable landscape. As he writes his poem, he reshapes the landscape at the same time. In other words, the Caribbean landscape writes itself at the same time while Walcott writes his poem. In this way, misrepresentation is redressed—by a form of more enlightened misrepresentation.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the visual-verbal crossing is part of a large movement where Caribbean artists have been exploring the interart relationship and its empowering potentials for breaking open not only the barriers between arts but also the barrier that excludes them from the realm of

art in general (Emery, 180)[30]. In a sense such crossings of the boundaries between the visual and the verbal arts have been ekphrastic in essence—and rightfully so, since coming to terms with (mis-)representation has long been the underlying issue for Caribbean artists. It is in this context, "following on the work of Jean Rhys and George Lamming," that ekphrasis—the most subtle yet destabilizing technique of visual-verbal crossing, has become a "central figure" (Emery, 180)—or an overarching general metaphor—for the aesthetical and political exploration of modern Caribbean artists. And Walcott, undoubtedly, is one of the few who employs this mode of visual-verbal crossing in sophisticated ways.

But the term is a complex one, as it has undergone considerable amount of transformation since it early uses in ancient Greece. Although the attempt to define the term, paradoxically, already complicates it, it is still useful here to briefly survey the major changes the term has undergone. "Ekphrasis" is commonly recognized nowadays as a verbal representation of one or several visual representation(s); or, to borrow Leo Spitzer's influential definition, "the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art" (Spitzer, 207). The biggest and most immediate difference between the two definitions lies in their scope. Spitzer's definition registers "ekphrasis" more narrowly. Although his usage of the word "poetic" does not necessarily restrict the description to the genre of poetry, it nevertheless emphasizes the poetic quality of the description.

[30] For more on the interart movement and its role in the tradition of modern Caribbean literature, see Mary Lou Emery, *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature*, pp. 180.

Admittedly what Spitzer exactly means by "poetic" is a little vague, but the very subject matter of his essay through which he defines "ekphrasis"—Keat's "Ode on a Grecian Urn", unmistakably invokes one of the most famous ekphrastic moments in the Western literary tradition: Homer's description of Achilles' shield—a work of Hephaestus' craft/art, in the eighteenth book of *The Iliad.* Perhaps it is reasonable to say, therefore, that when Spitzer wrote "poetic", it is likely that he had in mind the narrower, more specialized meaning of this word as denoting the generic nature of that descriptive language in question. In other words, by "poetic description", Spitzer most probably meant "the description in a poem". Apart from that, this definition also seems to limit the subject matter of ekphrastic poems to "pictorial or sculptural work of art", thus supposedly excluding other forms of arts. Yet I suggest Spitzer should not be taken too seriously in this respect, since the restriction he imposes may well be the result of a narrower view on what counts as visual art, or even works of art in general. In any case, if Spitzer's highly exclusive list of proper subject matter for ekphrastic poetry is to be taken too seriously, the very subject matter of his own essay—Keat's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"—must be the first one to be ruled out, since according to Spitzer's own definition, what the ode describes is neither a pictorial nor a sculptural work of art, and therefore the poem does not count as ekphrasis. It would suffice, I believe, to understand Spitzer's definition of the proper subject matter for ekphrasis as works of art in the more traditional and elitist sense (as opposed to the modern, popularized and expanded notion of

"visual art"), which although for centuries had consisted mainly of paintings and sculptures, should now include a group of handicrafts like Keat's Grecian urn, which in their own ways contain some forms of visual representation.

By comparison, the other definition that "ekphrasis" is the verbal representation of one (or several) visual representation(s) is more commonly accepted now and is much wider in its scope. By this definition, "ekphrasis" applies to any situation where the visual representation is in turn represented through words. This definition does not restrict the genre or nature of either the visual or the verbal representations. The scope is widened/deepened in three major aspects: 1) the visual representation can be a painting, a sculpture, a film, a poster, a wallpaper, etc.; 2) it does not matter whether or not this visual representation truly exists; and 3) the verbal representation of the visual representation can be anything ranging from passages in a novel, a poem, a journal entry, a piece of song lyrics, or perhaps even lines in advertisements.

The comparison above highlights a crucial tendency in the present-day development of the term "ekphrasis"—the multiplication of both its proper subject matter and its operating genre. The opening up of boundaries and the widening of scope reflect, and indeed are in spirit congenial to, the very nature of ekphrasis itself—a crossing between different sign systems which loosens and brings into freer interplay various elements originally separate and isolated in their own spheres. The blurring of the dividing lines between different art forms, the liquidization of rigid artistic patterns or paradigms, and the "quotation"

(Meir Sternberg's term)/translation/transformation of and from one form of text into another, all these moves necessarily questions and pose new challenges to not only old conceptions of interart relationships, but also to nature of representation. Ekphrasis, therefore, undoubtedly possesses immense political value and potential critical energy. For Walcott, then, it is one of the most important strategies with which he can interpret, critique, and challenge the misrepresentations of the Caribbean.

Reading Walcott's employment of ekphrasis, I have been using the term in its more general sense, as the (verbal) representation of representation(s). Apart from common tropes such as "world-as-text" which are ekphrastic in nature, Walcott also frequently uses the term in its standard sense—poetic representation of works of art, especially paintings. The nature of ekphrasis, or of the ekphrastic mode, has been the topic of countless discussions throughout the history of the term; and a brief survey of such discussions yields an overwhelming variety of different definitions, theories and conceptions of its potentials, testifying to the changes of meaning the term has undergone in the course of its evolution[31]. It is beyond the scope of the present study and indeed impossible to attempt any exhaustive review of all the existing theories about ekphrasis. Yet it would be useful to have a selective summary of the three major (general) categories into which various views on the trope might be grouped. On

[31] Ruth Webb, in her essay "*Ekphrasis* Ancient and Modern: the Invention of a Genre" maps in detail the development of the term from its ancient origin in rhetoric to its modern usage, revealing the rather striking fact that despite the long-time existence of forms of verbal description of artifacts, the term "ekphrasis" did not take up its current meaning until fairly recently, when in 1955 Leo Spitzer, in his essay on Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "coined the definition which most people now recognise" (Webb, 10)

its basic level, ekphrasis is commonly understood as a crossing-over and interaction between two semiotic systems. Murray Krieger, for example, reads the evolution of ekphrasis as in line with the language arts' "lengthy struggle to free themselves...from the secondariness assigned to them in their non-naturalness of representation", which has resulted "first in the rescuing of language from beneath the yoke of visual signs that it could try in vain to emulate, and then in the privileging of language as supreme among representational media" (Krieger, 7). While Krieger's essays[32] have excited various discussions on ekphrasis as capable of breaking open boundaries between the visual-verbal as well as the temporal-spatial, other critics have also commented on the trope's potential on higher levels. Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, for example, understands ekphrasis as an interpretive process, since "the work of art constitutes a statement already made about/in the world"; and because it enacts the "staging of the relation between words and images, poet and artist", ekphrasis is "inherently dialogic"(Loizeaux, 2008, 5). Claus Clüver, stressing the creative aspect of the same process, understands ekphrasis as semiotic re-writing—"re-presentation of texts by reformulation" which "requires transformation and adaptation to a new context rather than intersemiotic translation." (Clüver, 45)

It is within the scope of these three major understandings of ekphrasis—especially the last two—that Walcott employs the trope. For Walcott,

[32] Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel note that Krieger's earlier essay "Ekphrasis and the Still movement of Poetry" (1967) was "instrumental in renewing interest in the subject" (Robillard, x)

ekphrasis is in line with his general strategy of working against (mis-)representations through (mis-)representations. While a work of art—painting—is inevitably already mediated by certain ways of conceiving the world (Loizeaux, 2008, 5)[33] which "usually control the interpretation of images"(Loizeaux, 1999, 85), the re-rendering of it with words, being a re-creative process, opens the space for reformulation, in which the poet is given the liberty to interpret and re-envision the painting in almost every aspect—its theme, plot, the relations between subject matters, its focus/emphasis, mood, figuration, etc. One of Walcott's common moves is the shifting of the pictorial focus and re-centralization of the originally peripheral details.

In a passage in *Tiepolo's Hound*, the poet encounters one of Tiepolo's paintings, *Apelles Painting Campaspe*[34], which depicts a particular moment when the painter Apelles turns to look at the subject of his painting, Campaspe, while Alexander the Great sits behind the model and observes the painting process. The painting also hints at the story about Apelles falling in love with Campaspe, whom Alexander later gave him as a gift. Walcott's poetic description of the work, however, shifts the focus from the main plot onto two rather peripheral details: an African servant boy looking at the painting from the edge of Apelles' canvas (and the edge of Tiepolo's painting as well), and a white lapdog in the right lower corner.

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[33] George Handley similarly notes that: "ekphrasis is not simply aimed at using a linguistic metaphor for a visual representation; paintings of Turner, Pissarro, or others are themselves in tern already 'textualized' by the traditions of museums, art history and the subtle discourses of coffee table books and calendars…against with the words must wrestle, as much as with the image of the works themselves." (Handley, 249)

[34] See Appendix

... *Apelles Painting Campaspe*
is this allegory Tiepolo has painted himself,

painting his costumed models, on the floor, what must be
his mascot: a white lapdog revels in the wealth

of Venetian light. Alexander sprawls in a chair.
An admiring African peers from the canvas's edge

where a bare-shouldered model, Campaspe with gold hair
sees her myth evolve. The Moor silent with privilege. (Walcott, *TH*, 129)

The African servant and the dog, just like the soldiers outside the studio, are very likely just decorative details for the original painting; yet they have been given equal, if not central, attention in Walcott's ekphrastic lines. The most immediate effect of this move is the reformulation of the relationship between the characters. In the original painting, as suggested by its own name, the focus is on the painter and the model. If one may draw lines along the directions of the characters' eyesight/attention, the formation of "attention lines" at the centre of the painting would be a pair of near parallels, with Apelles's attention directed towards Campaspe, whose attention in turn is directed back towards the canvass, reinforced by Alexander's attention which is also directed towards the canvass. The African servant, who stays at the edge of both paintings (Apelles's and Tiepolo's), is left in the shadow cast by the canvas. In Walcott's ekphrastic recounting, however, the servant is not only given equal attention but also a

clear purpose. By imagining him as peering from the edge, Walcott lifts the African servant from a random decorative detail to a stable status in the painting. Thus a third point is created in addition to the two ends of the "attention lines" in the original painting, forming a new triangular relationship between the characters. While Apelles, Campaspe and Alexander look at each other, the African servant's eyesight would fall on both the canvas and the model, as he admires and studies the painting. To use the earlier discussed terms of "representational light", while re-presenting the visual representation, Walcott "illuminates" the figure of the African servant from his otherwise negligible existence in "darkness" in the original painting, and transforms him into a major figure in his new verbal-painting.

It is not difficult to see the empowering value of such a move, as it highlights the presence of the African servant as forming an irreplaceable part of an originally entirely white European plot. Moreover, the African is actually not represented so much as a servant than as an attentive observer of the painting process, "silent with privilege", and occupying a status of the same level as the other three main characters. By using the "light-darkness" metaphor of representation above, my intention is to refer Walcott's ekphrastic treatment of the African to an earlier moment in *Tiepolo's Hound* when he reflects on his engagement of the visual-verbal crossings:

> If I pitched my tints to a rhetorical excess,
> it was not from ambition but to touch the sublime,

to heighten the commonplace into the sacredness
of objects made radiant by the slow glaze of time,

from the dark that slices a loaf of bread by Chardin,
powerful as a porous pillar, or a wedge of cheese

monumental in stillness, to light that can gladden
the mind like the flash of a hound's thigh in Veronese. (Walcott, *TH*, 98)

Walcott's "illumination" of the African in the ekphrastic passage from his shadowy existence in the original painting in a way fulfills the task specified here—"to heighten the commonplace" (the neglected and forgotten). Yet on the other hand, while this quoted passage, with its reference to Chardin's loaf and the cheese (likely in Vermeer), recalls Walcott's earlier meditation on representation as the illumination and transfixation of a fluctuating Reality into a frame of time; the ekphrastic re-envisioning of the painting both "illuminates" the African from "darkness" and lifts him out of the frame of time—from the still moment in the original painting. Further, Walcott's verbal enlivening of the African is carried further by the poet's own identification with him: "If the frame is Time, with the usual saffron burning / of his ceilings over which robed figures glide, // we presume from the African's posture that I too am learning / both skill and conversion watching from the painting's side." (Walcott, *TH*, 129) The identification further disrupts the boundaries of temporality and spatiality already unsettled by the ekphrastic move, and leads to synchronization and

co-existence between the poet and his subjects. Thus while the African observes and learns from Apelles's painting, Walcott is also observing and learning from Tiepolo's painting. The line "If the frame is Time" is vague as it is unclear which frame is referred to here. But given the fact that Tiepolo's painting about Apelles painting Campaspe is already a representation of a representation, and Walcott's ekphrastic representation is therefore the triple representation which brings together the three representations under the same "frame" of time and space, it is reasonable to here apply George Handley's understanding of "Time" in *Tiepolo's Hound* as in general a form of "ekphrastic spatial seeing" (Handley, 237). In other words, "Time" denotes the ekphrastic synchronization that transcends the temporal, the chronological, and time itself. Tiepolo's painting, then, functions as "a portal and as a place of contact" (Loizeaux, 2008, 21). Only in this way can Walcott the poet assume the "posture" of the African and observe the painting together. Chronology, or History, are suspended, and along with them their inherent prioritization of notions such as the "original" over the "derivative", or the "master" over the "acolyte". As Loizeaux notes: The history that modern ekphrasis opens up is history as made by the artist and re-made by the viewer/poet." (Loizeaux, 2008, 21)

Thus Walcott's strategic use of ekphrasis is capable of constituting social power. The leveling out between the African servant and his European masters serves as a general metaphor for the re-visioning of a new relationship between, say the colonizer and the colonized, Europe and the Caribbean, the Old World

and the New World, etc. On the other hand, the ekphrastic merging of identities between Walcott and the African also serve as a metaphor for new possibilities for Caribbean artists who, entering a new relationship with European master painters and canonical authors, may be freed from the yoke of "illegitimate imitation", or as Walcott terms it—the "filial and tributary" relationship with the mother country—and emerge as even "privileged" with the diverse cultural heritages. Ekphrasis as a political strategy derives its energy from its own basic structure—seen by critics like Krieger as the "struggle" of the verbal against the visual signs. Mitchell, similarly, reads ekphrastic poetry as struggle between different "allegories of power and value", in which "texts encounter [and overcome] their own semiotic 'others'" (Mitchell, 156-7). The structure of ekphrasis as the "double-representation", to put it simply, opens the ground for a "second chance"—"a second sight, a second consideration" (Burwick, 109).

The "master-acolyte" parallel in the lines discussed above recalls another ekphrastic passage: the earlier moment when the poet envisions his father painting and learning from Turner just like Monet and Pissarro did. Walcott highlights a "triangulation" formed among his father, Monet, and Pissarro, as both his father and Monet used to copy Turner's *The Fighting Téméraire*[35]:

> Triangulation: in his drawing room
> my father copies *The Fighting Téméraire*,
>
> He and Monet admire the radiant doom
> of the original; all three men revere

[35] See Appendix

the crusted barge, its funnel bannering fire,
its torch guiding the great three-master on

to sink in the infernal asphalt of an empire
turning more spectral, like the mastodon. (Walcott, *TH*, 76)

"Triangulation" is the term Walcott has used to sum up the internal relationship between the "three men" in this ekphrastic account of Turner's painting. Handley provides a brief reading of the passage, informed by the term's meaning in land surveying: "*Triangulation* is a spatial order used in surveying to be able to delimit a location by means of measuring its distance from two distinct spots. Triangulation not only confirms the distance by means of two witnesses, but it also spatially places the three locations on a same plane." Thus through copying and studying from Turner's painting, just like Monet and Pissarro did, all three are joined on the same plane where they become legitimate heirs to Turner. In a way, similar triangulation also works in the ekphrastic account of *Apelles Painting Campaspe* as well—Walcott, mediated through the African servant's presence, assumes the role of an artist learning from earlier masters. Triangulation here need not necessarily mean a spatial co-existence between three parties, but denotes a form of empowering strategic alignment.

Informed by this equalizing view, the ekphrastic account of *The Fighting Téméraire* also carries Walcott's reflection on the relationships between individual artists and the entire European art tradition. The section describes the

scene in Turner's painting where the "barge" tugs the battleship to its final berth. What arrests the attention most in the ekphrastic lines, however, similar to the original painting, is not the named battleship which looms pale and vague behind the barge, but the barge itself, with its hard metallic colour, powerful steam-engine propeller wheels and the firing funnel. The barge, together with the deep orange sky at sunset, excites empathetic feelings such as "infernal" or "asphalt", which are further associated with the theme of the painting, thus generating the sense of "doom" yet dramatizing the decline of the empire into sublimity. Despite the similarities between the painting and Walcott's ekphrastic account, however, the latter adds another level of interpretation to the painting by introducing verbal interplay and cross-references into it. The ekphrastic account includes not only Turner's original painting, but also the copying of the original by Monet as well as Walcott's father. In the lines prior to the quoted section, Walcott recalls Pissarro's arrival at London and his tour with Monet in the art museums where they encountered and studied Turner's paintings. Thus Walcott envisions all three men: his father, Monet, and Pissarro as learning from Turner's works—and of course from *The Fighting Téméraire* as well. Reading the ekphrastic passage along with the original painting, the reference to the battleship as "the great three-master" is easily confirmed, since the ship did have three masts. But "three-master" (if one ignores the singular form of "master") may also be echoing the reference to Walcott's father, Monet and Pissarro as the "three men" in the previous couplet. The relation between the two references is

informed by the major theme of the painting: the sublimity of the decline of an empire. Both Walcott's father and Monet "admire" such sublimity, as Walcott writes: "He and Monet admire the radiant doom / of the original". But "doom / of the original" opens to both interpretations: 1) the sense of "doom" in Turner's original painting; and 2) the "doom" of Turner's painting itself. The second interpretation opens the ground for discussing issues like "original vs imitation" and "mastership vs apprenticeship". The admiration for the "doom / of the original", if interpreted this way, sheds new light on the poet's fascination with the sublimity of the declining empire. The implication here is not strictly political, as celebrating the passing of the old empire; but the allegorical sunset in Tuner's painting, while represented in Walcott's ekphrastic lines, sets upon Turner himself, as well as upon the European art tradition in general. The three men, who imitates and studies Turner, "reveres" the steam-powered barge which tugs the old battleship—the "great three-master"—to its final berth. The ekphrastic account thus acquires an extra allegorical level, which meditates on the later artists' relationship to their great predecessors, and constitutes a re-evaluation of artistic imitation in general. The later artists' imitation of great masters is not regarded as derivative, secondary, and therefore inferior, because the individual artists' relationship to the tradition is no longer conceived as a form of antagonism or a constant struggle against its constraints. The tradition, master artists and their works are not understood as unapproachable monuments or insurmountable peaks; instead, they are viewed as a system in continual

renewal. The emphasis on the temporality of art tradition as an evolving system allows later artists to transcend the constraint imposed by prejudiced sets of evaluative terms such as "original-derivative", "original-imitative", "primary-secondary", etc. Such a view on tradition, therefore, ensures equal footing—if not equal level of achievement—between the "canonical" artists and those who come after them in their spatial encounters. Tradition, great artists and their works are what later artists need to work with, and through, in order to become part of.

Walcott's meditation through visual art allows him to deal with both issues in the collective Caribbean experience and his personal goals for his literary career. As he frequently reflects on Caribbean artists' status and opportunity in their encounter with the European art and literary traditions, he reflects on both collective and personal terms. In an 1990 interview with Shaun McCarthy, Walcott complained about the tendency in literary criticism to "judge poetry chronologically"—while facing a new work (particular one from non-European regions), critics tend to use familiar, pre-existing works to "harness the novelty of this unfamiliar work by saying 'it's like X, or like y': 'The critic will say you see we did it before and now you are learning how to do it'" (Greenwood, 134). Walcott's complaint calls to mind the opening passages of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" where Eliot observes critics' often derogatory usage of the word "tradition", or its adjective form, "traditional": "we employ the adjective saying that the poetry of So-and-so is 'traditional' or even 'too traditional.' ...

You can hardly make the word agreeable to the English ears without [some] comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archaeology." (Eliot, 761). It may appear that Walcott and Eliot are making opposite claims about the "individual-tradition" relation; yet what Walcott stresses is not so much the "novelty" of Caribbean writers' works as different from the existing English literary tradition, but the necessity of accepting their works as part of and the legitimate extension of that tradition. As in "The Muse of History"—another of his longer essays, Walcott criticizes, that "many critics of contemporary Commonwealth verse reject imitation, the basis of the tradition, for originality, the false basis of innovation, they represent eventually the old patronizing attitude adapted to contemporaneous politics" (Walcott, *WTS*, 54). In this sense Walcott's view about the individual poet's proper relation with the literary tradition is similar to Eliot's. Eliot's assertions that greatest writers write with a "perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (Eliot, 761) shares the similar transcendence of history/chronology (temporality) with Walcott's "triangular" spatial encounter between acolytes and masters. Walcott's unique poetry highly mediated by European art and literary traditions, on the other hand, serves as a perfect examples of Eliot's view that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." (Eliot, 761) Above all, through either figurative (such as the ekphrastic passage on *The Fighting Téméraire*) or essayistic language, both share similar understandings of

the conditions of literary tradition—to borrow Eliot's words:

> [E]xisting monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted. (Eliot, 761-2)

Although Walcott shares the same view as Eliot, in practice, however, he must deal with more complicated issues than Eliot. As a Caribbean poet he faces both the blessing and challenge from his diverse cultural inheritances. While in various situations he has been able to establish, with his poetic meditation through/on the visual art, an open and dynamic relationship with European art and literary traditions, the question of how one should understand and handle colonial history and its legacies has been the common issue for Caribbean writers and intellectuals, as well as the ground for heated debates. This is the issue that has been central to Walcott's strategic maneuvers and negotiations between his literary responsibility and aspiration. His take on it which combines his public and personal literary goals has been, in sum, a mutual engagement between his (post-)colonial awareness and his marked Modernist poetics. Walcott's personal literary goal is thus deeply informed by his awareness of the cultural/political contexts of his (as well as other Caribbean artists') literary career.

Underlying the issue of history for Caribbean intellectuals and writers has

been the demand for finding ways to handle the cultural and intellectual impacts of colonial history. The cultural hybridity of the Caribbean has itself been the result of such impact, and in turn has been the cause for further cultural characteristics of the region. Colonial history and multicultural settings have also affected the linguistic features of the region, resulting in the prevailing of European languages such as English and French which co-exist with several types of Creole heavily influenced by these languages[36]. As Victor Chang documents in his survey of the development of West Indian literature, Caribbean writers have been responding to the cultural situation of the region in various ways since late nineteenth-century[37], with increasing maturity and sophistication of vision and strategy. On the other hand, however, the particularity of the region's cultural situation has excluded some common options available to writers of colonised regions. Patrick Colm Hogan notes that compared with Indian and African authors, "Caribbean authors are much less directly linked to the traditions of their ancestors", and that even with the strong African presence, "elements of African traditions" survive "for the most part in a diminished, concealed, and in many ways Europeanized form." (Hogan, 92) This situation is what Walcott refers to in "What the Twilight Says" when he writes: "West Indian artists knew the need for revolt without knowing what weapons to use" (Walcott, *WTS*, 16). And as I have argued in the previous chapters, this situation

[36] For a more detailed mapping of the linguistic features and their distribution in the Caribbean region, see Laurence A. Breiner: "Creole Language in the Poetry of Derek Walcott" in *Callaloo* 28.1 (2005) pp.29-31.
[37] Victor Chang: "West Indian Poetry" in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*. ed. Neil Roberts. Oxford; Malden: Blackwell, 2001.

was the cultural context that frustrated Walcott's early "intense desire to depict and express the essence of his Caribbean surroundings" (Mjöberg). Walcott frequently uses language as the typical example for cultural inheritance or the impact of history (as, for example, in "A Far Cry from Africa"). In "What the Twilight Says", he recalls the constraint of colonial history on his literary aspiration:

> At nineteen, an elate, exuberant poet madly in love with English, but in the dialect-loud dusk of water buckets and fish sellers, conscious of the naked, voluble poverty around me, I felt a fear of that darkness which had swallowed up all fathers. (Walcott, *WTS*, 10)

Walcott was not alone in feeling this way, as the frustration was a collective experience. In "The Muse of History", Walcott notes such frustration, again through the figure of language: "This shame and awe of history possess poets of the Third World who think language as enslavement and who, in a rage for identity, respect only incoherence or nostalgia." (Walcott, *WTS*, 37) Such is one of many instances in "The Muse of History" when Walcott observes the impact of the constraint imposed on Caribbean writers by the colonial history of the region. Thus he aptly quotes James Joyce at the beginning of the essay: "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." (Walcott, *WTS*, 36)

The quote from Joyce, however, serves also the purpose of drawing connections between Walcott and Joyce, as well as between the Caribbean (esp. the English Caribbean) and Irish literature. Hogan notes that the "parallelism of language and of circumstance seems to have resulted in a special sense of

literary affinity" between the two regions; and consequently, many Caribbean writers "have found a particularly fruitful source of subaltern literature in Ireland." [38] (Hogan, 93) In fact, more than drawing "literary affinity", connecting the Caribbean to Ireland is not just a link-up between two regions with the similar colonial past, but also a move with which Caribbean writers may gain legitimate access to the metropolitan literary tradition. The double-status of Irish literature as both a subaltern literature and "a late addition to the metropolitan tradition" (Hogan, 93) helps smooth the recalibration of the Caribbean literary vision—not strictly according to metropolitan standards, but as informed by a recognition of greater possibilities/opportunities. Irish literature thus serves very much as a model, or an example of the possible relationship between the literature of a colonised region and that of the mother country. On the other hand it also exists as an extension of the metropolitan tradition, for Caribbean literature to work through rather than blindly reject or emulate. It is through such recalibration and re-self-positioning on the large scale that Walcott perceives the possibility on the personal scale for his great literary aspiration which is, as mentioned earlier, to "take on the metropolitan tradition and establish himself as achieving feats comparable...to those figures who define the entire tradition." (Hogan, 163) This is why while he connects himself to and speaks through Joyce, he also frequently and consciously differentiates his work from Joyce's, as in the Stanford interview he repeatedly

[38] Hogan notes that: "we find a range of poets working to use and beautify Caribbean English, in part inspired by the work of Synge, Lady Gregory, and others in Ireland". For more examples, see Hogan: pp. 93-4.

emphasizes the difference between his *Omeros* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, stressing on the other hand his direct connection with, and again difference from, Homer[39]. Such a relationship with the metropolitan or canonical masters again recalls the mode of triangular spatial encounter constituted by Walcott's ekphrastic passages. It is also what Walcott understands as the relationship between the individual artist and his/her great predecessors from the entire art tradition.

In "The Muse of History", this same mode supplies the fundamental notion of equality underlying Walcott's view of the Caribbean artists' relationship with the European tradition—and hence his own position with regard to the European literary giants such as Homer, Dante, Milton, etc. He distinguishes between the notion of "history" and that of "tradition": understanding "history" as causing a malaise of intellectual stasis or, a "nostalgia for the older culture and a melancholy at the new"; "tradition", on the other hand, is understood as "alert, alive, simultaneous" and embodied by great artists as well as carried on by later generations. The Caribbean artists occupy the same position as their European counterparts as equal and legitimate heirs to their common heritages. The emphasis, though, is not on the equal footing between Caribbean and European artists, but on the connection between Caribbean artists and their European predecessors—especially those who define the tradition. Returning to the figure of "language", Walcott emphasizes that "the speeches of Caliban are equal in their elemental power to those of his tutor. The language of the torturer mastered

[39] Walcott repeatedly stresses upon the nature of his allusions to *Odyssey* in *Omeros* as "referential" instead of "the direct thing" (Stanford, 9:20)

by the victim … [should not be] viewed as servitude, [but] as victory" (Walcott, *WTS*, 39-42). Thus Walcott replaces the troubling issue of constraining and ineradicable "colonial history" with a new recognition of "tradition" as available and empowering. In this view, European cultural heritage is not part of the stagnant "history" but of the "tradition" as embodied, alive and carried on by not only European but also Caribbean artists; and for the latter, hybrid as they are, being the legitimate heir to their multiple cultural ancestries (this is viewed as a privilege too), Caribbean artists are at the liberty of "making creative use of [their] schizophrenia, an electric fusion of the old and the new." (Walcott, *WTS*, 16) This recognition of the value of the colonial legacy and its enabling power is strengthened in "The Muse of History": "[T]he tribe in bondage learned to fortify itself by cunning assimilation of the religion of the Old World. What seemed to be surrender was redemption. What seemed the loss of tradition was its renewal. What seemed the death of faith, was its rebirth…" (Walcott, *WTS*, 43) Thus the phrase "cunning assimilation" answers the question "How choose"—posed by the Walcott persona of "A Far Cry from Africa" torn between "this Africa and the English tongue I love".

In this way Walcott has constructed a dialectic out of his poetics, which combines into one and the same project his responsibility to the Caribbean and his personal literary aspiration (for recognition and even canonization). But this should not be mistaken as a happy arrival at any privileged position. This formulation centres upon his strategic self-positioning with regard to the larger

context in which he works. On the large scale, in most cases, it is carried out through strategic envisioning and interpretation of cultural relationships between the Caribbean and Europe, which provides the context in which his literary aspiration figures as at least theoretically achievable, and which in turn testifies to the same possibility for other Caribbean artists; on the elemental scale, by working through paintings and the visual art in general, he addresses theoretical and practical issues of seeing and representation, helping him to both handle the Caribbean experiences along political lines, as well as to engage in aesthetic discussions carried on throughout the entire metropolitan literary history, which itself testifies to and consolidates his self-positioning as capable of "achieving comparable feats" to his European counterparts and great predecessors.

As I said, central to this project is the strategic self-positioning of the Caribbean alongside Europe, and of Walcott himself alongside great literary masters. Walcott understands the primary condition that authorizes this maneuver as ultimately his hybridity. In the poem "The Schooner Flight" (1979), he speaks through his persona of the impact of his hybridity: "I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me, / and either I am nobody, or I am a nation / In reality, this meant: // I had no nation now but the imagination" (Walcott, *Collected*, 345). The juxtaposition of "nation" and "imagination" suggests that for the hybrid Caribbean artist, the root of identity could be found in, or founded upon, envisioned position, which could be more empowering than what "reality" could have offered. The artist's position could be rooted in the "imagined nation".

Besides, Walcott draws the parallel between the two by playing on the coincidental overlapping of the inflection "-ation" and the word "nation", thus brings the re-conception of the latter as "image-nation", highlighting the close relationship between his re-positioning and his extensive use of images—paintings and the visual art, and imagery—a key component of his poetry. Finally, the juxtaposition of words and images is itself one of Walcott's most frequently used techniques to challenge existing conceptions of the Caribbean and provoke re-conceptions of the relationship between the Caribbean and Europe. Often, such pairing of places, objects, or ideas amounts to great spatial and/or temporal span. These strategic uses of images can be best illustrated by "Poem II" in *Midsummer*, in which Walcott uses all these techniques to draw connection between Rome and the Caribbean.

This poem, for a large part, records what the speaker sees and feels while travelling and staying in a "pensione" (boarding house) in Rome. The poem can be divided into three parts. The first part has the speaker describing a possible companion on this trip. The second part paints a portrait of the ancient city of Rome, followed by a close-up on an old woman's life inextricably rooted in it. The last part shifts the focus from the speaker's observation in Rome to his reflection on the Caribbean, and concludes the poem by drawing comparisons and analogies between the two places.

The first part centres on the figure of the companion, who is "[t]onsured" and who is "crouched in some ancient pensione / …, like young St. Jerome /

with his rock vault" (Line 3-5, II). The image conveys a vivid sense of weighty stillness and silence, and this effect is rendered more poignant through the presentation of the light "gurgles" of the pigeon on the "flaking, sunlit ledge" (Line 7, II). Rome as a city with heavy, monumental history, full of "peeling frescos", is drawn into an analogy with old people. The city stands (or maybe crouches) as an old person, weathered and immobile. Further, as the opening lines of the poem remarks, "Companion in Rome, whom Rome makes as old as Rome," (Line 1, II) the ancient city is portrayed as being also capable of aging and almost fossilizing everything that comes within its power.

The idea of stillness and silence is intensified and dramatized through creating sharp contrasts between light and darkness. In the first part, the contrast is embedded in the allusion to St. Jerome's experiences in the "rock vault"—the underground sepulchers and crypts—where lights could only filter in from above through the shafts. The "companion", like St. Jerome, is caught between the darkness in the room and the sunlight that steals in from outside. This configuration of images recalls Walcott's extensive knowledge of similar techniques used by painters such as Chardin, Vermeer, or Rembrandt, which creates a strengthened heavy sense of silence and immovability, as in still-life.

Sharp contrasts are sustained in the second part of the poem as well—but less in the form of light-darkness, and more in the form of distinct differences in the colour, as well as through juxtapositions of remotely related images or ideas. In tune with the sense of stillness in the first part, the second part thus opens

with a few transitional lines:

> Midsummer's furnace casts everything in bronze.
> *Traffic* flows in slow coils, like the doors of a *baptistery*,
> and even the *kitten's eyes* blaze with *Byzantine icons*. [italics mine] (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 12)

On the one hand, these lines take after the mood created in the first part of the poem, by portraying the ancient city in languor and slow motion. On the other hand, by juxtaposing images and ideas such as the slowness of the traffic and the slowness of the doors of a baptistery, or the kitten's eyes and the Byzantine icons, they also help to initiate the main body of the second part, which consists of numerous juxtapositions of objects or ideas of the mundane everyday life, and those of high spirituality:

> That old woman in black, unwrinkling your sheet with a palm,
> her *home* is *Rome*, its *history* is her *house*.
> Every *Caesar's life* has shrunk to a *candle's column*
> in her saucer. Salt cleans their bloodstained togas.
> She stacks up the *popes* like *towels in cathedral drawers*;
> now in her stone *kitchen*, under the *domes* of *onions*,
> she slices a *light*, as thick as *cheese*, into *epochs*. [Italics mine] (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 12)

The contrast in colour is intense: the old woman dressed in black, and working in the dimly lighted stone kitchen, as opposed to the background of the city with its cathedrals and Byzantine style domes all "in bronze". Similar to the first part, the colour contrast serves to isolate and focus the reader's attention on the main figure of the scene, and sustains, with the help from words like "slow", "old",

and "epochs", the sense of immovability, or even a suspension of time. This mood, on another level, fits well with the images and ideas of high spirituality which, when they are fused with the mundane everyday life, vividly portray the city of Rome as a place where life is spiritually informed and guided (and perhaps even dominated) by its long-standing history, belief, and tradition.

It would be helpful, before going into the final part, to examine yet another important feature common to both the first two parts. While it is true that both of them convey a heavy sense that history, tradition, and especially religion are still alive in Rome's everyday life—as remarked by line 12: "her home is Rome, its history is her house"; it is equally undeniable that accompanying and looming large behind this very recognition, there is also the phantom of death, decay, and destruction. Besides the stillness and oldness of the city, the "peeling fresco" and the allusion to St. Jerome's visits to the "rock vault" bears the unmistakable odour of death. In other places, the image of midsummer as the "furnace" casting everything in bronze seems also to carry the idea of burning the entire city; the mention of the "Byzantine icons", while assuring the position of religion on the one hand, may also remind the reader of the famous Byzantine Iconoclasm in the eighth and the ninth centuries. And further, perhaps the ideas that "Every Caesar's life has shrunk to a candle's column / in her saucer" and "Salt cleans their bloodstained togas", are signs of the recognition that death, same as life, has always been a part of the history and tradition of Rome.

Interestingly, it is by the images of decay and death that the final part of the

poem is threaded with the previous two parts:

> Her kitchen wall flakes like an atlas where, once,
>
> *Ibi dracones* was written, where unchristened cannibals
>
> gnawed on the dry coconuts as Ugolino did.
>
> Hell's hearth is as cold as Pompeiis. We're punished by bells
>
> as gentle as lilies. … (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 12)

The Caribbean in these lines is a place that used to bear the mark "Ibi dracones" (The dragon is here)—a place deemed barbaric, dangerous, and much fantasized about. Yet it is obvious that such a view is formed from the standpoint of a European Christian (in this case perhaps a Roman) and, as the speaker notes it, is already obsolete, dead and decaying. The image of the flaking atlas-wall signifies the demise of the old Eurocentric world view. And the connection drawn between the cannibals gnawing on coconuts on the one hand, and on the other hand the Italian commander Ugolino della Gherardesca who was famous for gnawing on his enemy's head, is not without a sense of irony. But the comparison between Rome and the Caribbean does not stop with the irony, and is pushed further into a refutation of the unjustified views on the Caribbean through equating the horror of Pompeii's tragedy with the horror of Hell, as well as through dismissing the "punishment" of the "cannibals" imagined by the self-righteous Christians as entirely powerless. Following the lead of the counterargument, the speaker attempts a challenge to Rome's ultimate pride—its long history and cultural legacies: "Luck to your Roman elegies / that the honey

of time will riddle like those of Ovid" (Line 22-3, II). It is possible that the speaker is trying to point out that Rome's prestigious status is mostly achieved by existing for a very long time, with the unsaid remark being: given the luck that Rome has enjoyed, any place might become Rome when it is sweetened by centuries of time. In this way, the speaker seeks to deconstruct the basis upon which Rome, and indeed the Eurocentric world view that Rome here represents, has built its prejudice against geographically and culturally marginalized places such as the Caribbean.

After deconstructing Eurocentricism from within, the speaker switches the focus of his vision from Rome to the Caribbean. This is where the biggest group of contrasts is established—through juxtapositions, comparisons, and analogies. Walcott illustrates with these final lines his understanding, expressed in "The Muse of History", of "tradition" as different from "history". Contrasting the portrayal of Rome burdened by its heavy history, the Caribbean is charged with an enlivening energy through the tradition it inherits. The connection—the comparison and analogy—between Rome and the Caribbean is easy to detect, from the deliberate pairing up of images from both sides:

> *Corals* up to their windows in sand are my *sacred domes*,
> *gulls* circling a *seine* are the *pigeons* of my *St. Mark's*,
> silver legions of *mackerel* race through our *catacombs*. [Italics mine]
> (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 12)

Besides the obvious analogy and comparison, the most eye-catching feature of this part is again the contrast in colour and motion. In every pair of images, the

colours differ dramatically. Unlike the simply coloured stone domes of Rome, the "domes" of the Caribbean are the colourful corals; unlike Rome's dry and dark catacombs full of corpses, the Caribbean "catacombs" are watery, bright, and teeming with life. Further, whereas the San Marco basilica of Rome is solid, firm and enclosed, the "St. Mark's" of the Caribbean is the soft, flexible, and open sea surface. Walcott here subverts the common assumptions about "culture", "history", or "civilization" which are, as he says in "The Antilles", "based on achievement" (Walcott, "Antilles"). With all these images titled under the triumphant "my" or "our", the speaker is eager to demonstrate that with the removal of the long-established criteria against which cultures have often been judged, centralized or marginalized, what used to be disadvantages for a culture may in fact become advantages and paths to new possibilities.

It is important to notice that, in the ending lines where Rome and the Caribbean are linked in a series of similes: corals—domes, gulls over seine—pigeons of St. Mark's, underwater landscape—underground catacombs, the pairing up serves not only to sharpen the contrast between the stillness of Rome and the exuberance of the Caribbean, but also to "reflect a deeper similarity" (Greenwood, 133). This is one of Walcott's typical ways of using similes, which draws attention to both the differences and the similarities between the two parties involved. Greenwood notes that it would be inadequate to simply outline the two parties here, because they "introduc[e] hierarchical relationships that recall the imperialist's claim to precedence and priority" in the

"two-world typology" (Greenwood, 133-4). I think Greenwood's critique on metaphor/similes here is conducted on its ontological basis, which means that she is pointing to something almost like a defect inherent to metaphor/similes. By this view, such "hierarchies", "precedence and priority", are presupposed before one uses this rhetorical device. Herein lies a significant difference between using similes and metaphors. While Walcott uses similes instead of metaphor to connect Europe and the Caribbean, he effectively avoids using such structures as: "A is like B", but instead could say: "A is B", thus eliminating the intervening assumptions of "precedence", the "origin", or "hierarchy". It levels the Caribbean with Europe, and serves as a perfect example of Walcott's vision of drawing from the core of European culture the enabling and transforming power to shed new light on the old view of the Caribbean landscape and culture—a strategic absorption, a "cunning assimilation" (Walcott, *WTS*, 43). The idea of transformation does not carry the subtext of "civilizing the Caribbean with Europe"; but rather, denotes the change from precisely this old and colonial notion of hierarchy and precedence to a new and informed vision of the Caribbean as not derivative, marginal, or peripheral, but existing alongside European culture.

As "Poem II" demonstrates, through his creative and highly strategic use of imagery and the visual elements, Walcott constructs in his "image-nation" a fundamental equality and kinship between European and Caribbean cultures, to both of which he is a legitimate heir and from both he equally draws as great

European masters did. On the other hand, Walcott positions himself at once among the canonical western literary figures such as Homer, Virgil, Milton, etc., and as outside both this tradition and that of the Caribbean which has produced names like V.S Naipaul or Wilson Harris. Patrick Colm Hogan, in the book *Empire and Poetic Voice: Cognitive and Cultural Studies of Literary Tradition and Colonialism,* devotes a chapter to detailed comparisons between Walcott's *Omeros* and *The Iliad, The Odyssey, The Aeneid, The Devine Comedy, Paradise Lost*, and *Ulysses*, arguing that in this work "Walcott has taken up the European epic tradition, placing himself not only in its main stream, but directly in the company of its paradigm practitioners." (Hogan, 195) Hogan is highly perceptive about Walcott's literary aspiration, and understands it as "not one of denouncing the white epic, nor…one of finding suppressed black epics, not of highlighting a subversive strain in the European epic tradition", but one that through "working through the major European epics", seeks to "establish that his work is of their caliber and deserves a place among them, that he should be listed in the company of the 'paradigm' epicists…or even outdo them" (Hogan, 23). This project is in nature and practice akin to his poetic maneuver through and against the visual/representation which, as I discussed in the previous chapter, seeks to deconstruct the assumption of "faithfulness" by pointing out the fictiveness of the notion of "origin" and thus prioritizing the strategic "imitation" of it. Again, paintings, painters and visual art in general figure prominently in Walcott's poetic meditations and discussions of these issues. Yet

among all his poetry works, *Tiepolo's Hound*, besides the numerous ekphrastic passages such as the aforementioned *Apelles Painting Campaspe* and *The Fighting Téméraire*, is probably the one most heavily informed by Walcott's knowledge about the European art tradition. The references to paintings and painters expand on the scale of the entire book, through which Walcott, again, negotiates his position with the Caribbean and Europe, and contemplates his literary career in its cultural contexts.

Tiepolo's Hound is a work in which not only the idea of painting/painter figures most prominently among other works by Walcott, but twenty-six actual oil or watercolour paintings by the poet are inserted in different sections of the book. Peter Erickson observes that "*Tiepolo's Hound* represents an unprecedented elevation of the visual component of Walcott's work."(Erikson, 224) The inclusion of actual painting into the volume introduces a crucial dynamics into the poetics of the work. On the surface, the four books constitute a record of the poet's journey from the Caribbean towards Europe—in a quest for the image of a white hound he once saw in a painting by a European artist. Paralleling this journey is another journey of the French painter Camille Pissarro from his native island St. Thomas to Paris, and then to London. But the journeys are also symbolic ones from the cultural periphery towards the centre. Like Pissarro's journey, the poet's search for the white hound is more than a need for the satisfaction of some haunting curiosity, but an allegory of Walcott's literary aspiration for the acceptance, recognition, and establishment of his literary status.

The poet's initial impression of the hound was condensed with highly symbolic images:

> I remember stairs in couplets. The Metropolitan's
> marble authority, I remember being
>
> stunned as I studied the exact expanse
> of a Renaissance feast, the art of seeing.
>
> Then I caught a slash of pink on the inner thigh
> of a white hound entering the cave of a table,
>
> so exact in its lucency at *The Feast of Levi*,
> I felt my heart halt. … (Walcott, *Tiepolo*, 7)

This ekphrastic description of Veronese's *The Feast of Levi*[40] follows the line "Across that distance light was my first lesson" which refers to a still life by Cézanne the poet saw in the museum. The poet sees himself as a student learning from great European masters. The ekphrastic description of the huge overarching marble structures in *The Feast of Levi* is envisioned as the embodiment of the achievement of the European art tradition—"[t]he Metropolitan's / marble authority", to which the student tries to ascend. However instead of painting, the poet associates the learning process with poetry, as he imagines the ekphrastic account in couplets he is writing to be the stairs by which he learns from the masterpiece. While painters learn from great masters first by studying and copying their paintings, the poet does his own studying and

[40] See Appendix.

copying through his ekphrastic couplets. The focus of the passages is thus shifted in subtle ways from painting to poetry. While the allegorical reference to painting is sustained, the ekphrastic section is actually all the time conscious of its own distance from the painting it tries to represent, as the lines are frequently guided by phrases indicating the process of perception, such as "I remember", "I studied", "I caught [sight of]", "I felt". As the poet sums up the experience of viewing *The Feast of Levi*, it is the "the art of seeing" that the poet studies from the masters. In this respect, the distinction between painting and poetry is blurred, because both are constituted in the "art of seeing"—and of expressing too, for that matter. This is at least true for Walcott—if not anyone else—who, as he said in his poem, "is drawn to details". In the Abodunrin interview, as mentioned earlier, Walcott also expressed his belief in "realistic" painting instead of "abstract" ones. Although, as shown by his meditative poem on painting and representation, what he is really drawn to is not so much the absolute reality but the ability of artistic works to structure the sense of realism in its own figurative framework. The white hound, then, embodies the perfection of art in Walcott's understanding of the term. It is a random detail, the "precision that doesn't need to be there" (Terada, 1992, 133); yet it is what enlivens the entire work. Thus Walcott envisions himself in an encounter with art's ultimate secret:

> … So a miracle leaves
>
> its frame, and one epiphanic detail

illuminates an entire epoch:

a medal by Holbein, a Vermeer earring, every scale
of a walking mackerel by Bosch, their sacred shock.

The perfection that the white hound embodies is the perfection of art; but more than that, it also embodies the perfection of representational technique, on which both painting and poetry must rely. The references to Holbein, Vermeer and Bosch further explain this technique about details. The "medal by Holbein" is a likely reference to the shining medal in the well-known portrait of Sir Thomas More[41] by Hans Holbein the Younger. "Vermeer earring" is the reference to Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, which gives a highly realistic rendering of the texture of the earring through the mastery of light. The reference of the "walking mackerel" is to the painting *Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch. The image of the fish scale suggests a similar attentiveness to the "epiphanic details".

Leafing through paintings, the poet's attention is again drawn back to poetry, as he invokes the couplet-stair metaphor again:

Between me and Venice the thigh of a hound:
my awe of the ordinary, because even as I write,

paused on a step of this couplet, I have never found
its image again, a hound in astounding light. (Walcott, *Tiepolo*, 8)

The distance between the poet/student and the symbolic city of artistic perfection is caused by the missing white hound. The reference to the current

[41] See Appendix

couplet as the "step" brings again the earlier idea of the ascent to perfection. But recognizing his distance from his goal, the poet "pause[s]" on the step, wanting the white hound. The poem is thus constructed as a verbal quest itself. The aspiring poet attempts to ascend, through these steps of couplets, to his literary goal.

The search for the white hound, however, seems frustrated, as the image of the hound is as elusive as the technique that creates it. To the traveller/poet, it seems at once vivid, near, lively on the one hand, and far, incomplete, and haunting on the other. Thus the haunted poet frequently repeats the same images:

> The metallic shine of a gaping mackerel,
> the ring in its dead eye like a Vermeer earring;
>
> that highlight on its skin sharpening smell.
> There mastery lay in Manet, the same daring
>
> that caught the vermilion light in a hound's thigh,
> one stroke on the dog and the staring mackerel,
>
> the spectral animal at *The Feast of Levi*,
> licking her outstretched hand, shared the one skill. (Walcott, *Tiepolo*, 44)

If the text itself is viewed as the verbal quest for artistic perfection, then the poet is not making progress. What the search has led him to find is not artistic perfection, but the "spectral" nature of such a notion. This recognition recalls

another of Walcott's important views on art, thoroughly expressed in the poem "Watteau" from *Midsummer*.

The poem is an ekphrastic account of Jean-Antoine Watteau's famous painting *Embarkation for Cythera*[42]. The painting exists in two versions slightly varying from each other. Both depict the scene from an amorous party by a group of French aristocracies in some pastoral setting. It is not clear whether the couples are leaving or just arriving at the place which looks like an island. The title of the painting leads one to associate the island with Cythera, the birth place of Venus. The statue of Venus depicted in the scene also supports the association. Despite the amorous and lighthearted Rococo style of the painting, what Walcott interprets from it in his ekphrastic poem, however, is a pervading/prevailing sense of hollowness. Such a feeling is perceptible from the beginning:

> The amber spray of trees feather-brushed with the dusk,
> the ruined cavity of some spectral château, the groin
> of a leering satyr eaten with ivy. In the distance, the grain
> of some unreapable, alchemical harvest, the hollow at
> the heart of all embarkations. … (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 31)

It is important to note the spatial relationship of these described details in the original painting. The "spray of trees" are on the top; the "château" is on the left edge of the canvas; the statue of Venus which Walcott takes as the "satyr" is on the right side; and the "grain", although not really "in a distance", is likely the vegetation at the bottom of the painting. Thus Walcott outlines all the four sides of the painting, leaving out the group of people at the centre (heart) of the

[42] See Appendix

picture—"the hollow at / the heart of all embarkation". The "trees", "château", "satyr" and "grain", however, are all ridden with all kinds of hollowness. The "spray" of trees "feather-brushed" conveys the sense of lightness and thinness, similar to the "grains" which are only "alchemical" and thus "unreapable". Both of them seem to exist in an unreachable, insubstantial state. The "château", on the other hand, is only a "ruined cavity", itself a hollow, ghostly existence. Given the easily identifiable image of the statue of Venus, it is likely that Walcott only deliberately misreads it as a satyr, thus replacing the higher form of (sexual) lover with a more primitive form of lust which, itself, seems only unsatisfied, as the statue of the satyr is a broken one—his "groin" "eaten with ivy", and could only "leer" at the couples frolicking around. Surrounded by such "hollowness", the people are read as also hollowed out in the inside—"hollow at / the heart". Thus a later line echoes: "in all of his journeys the pilgrims are in fever / from that tremulous strokes of malaria's laureate." The line refers to Watteau's fever and tuberculosis, from which he suffered delirium and later died. But the tremor of the painter's hand is embodied by the characters he paints now. As Terada notes, "Walcott allegorizes technique" (Terada, 1992, 149), which is the same move repeated in *Tiepolo's Hound* as he constructs the overarching metaphor of the white hound for the perfection of the artistic technique, frequently condensing it to "a stroke" on the dog's thigh. However, such allegorization is also deeply aware of the impossibility of technique as well. The hollowness is echoed by the "amber spray of trees" which does not stay green.

"Amber" is the colour that "for Walcott symbolizes the attempt to preserve" (Terada, 1992, 149)—a futile attempt since "[n]othing says green / in that prodigious urging toward twilight". Again, Walcott reflects upon the spatiality of painting in its encounter with the temporality of life it tries to capture. The "urge toward twilight" is the unstoppable fading of light into darkness. Art, for all its might, must have its limitation. With this recognition, the poet poses the rhetorical question: "So where is Cythera?" and immediately answers it: "It, too, is far and feverish, / it dilates on the horizon of his near-delirium, near / and then further". The delirious vision of the feverish Watteau is allegorized into the vision of art/artist in general, chasing after the unrepresentable essence of life. The elusive image of Cythera functions in the same way as the haunting image of the white hound in *Tiepolo's Hound*—"dilat[ing] on the horizon", "near / and further". Such a "feverish" longing for the might and perfection of technique is understood by the poet as being at the (hollow) heart of European art/artists in general—but especially in poetry: "it is as much nowhere / as these broad-leafed islands, it is the disease / of elephantine vegetation in Baudelaire, / the tropic bug in the Paris fog." The reference to Baudelaire and his dark poem on Cythera also appears in the 1974 "The Muse of History", where Walcott critiques the old ideal of art as based upon an existentialistic view on the essence of life:

> Existentialism is as much nostalgia as in Rousseau's sophisticated primitivism, as sick as recurrence in French thought as the isle of Cythera, whether it is the tubercular, fevered imagery of Watteau or the same fever turned delirious in Rimbaud and Baudelaire. The poets of

> the "New Aegean," of the Isles of the Blest, the Fortunate Isles, of the remote Bermudas, of Prospero's isle, of Crusoe's Juan Fernandez, of Cythera, of all those rocks named like the beads of a chaplet, they know that the old vision of Paradise wrecks here. (Walcott, *WTS*, 42)

The "wreck[age]" of "Paradise" is the lost (unattainable) ideal state of art, an artistic perfection as far and remote as the legendary islands towards which artists—poets—set their pilgrimage, just like Watteau's pilgrims did. As Walcott sees it, such pilgrimage is urged by that "diseased", "feverish" vision for Cythera—"the mirror / of what is. Paradise is life repeated spectrally, / an empty chair echoing the emptiness." The "mirror" of art only offers a "spectral repetition" of life. Further, the idea of life is itself understood as a form of emptiness, echoed by the empty art. The logic is again based on that notion of the unknowable and unattainable nature of true reality. Art and life is thus viewed as two opposing mirrors, generating an infinite repetition of reflections. Astounding light in the stroke on the white hound's thigh, is the same light that illuminates the medal in Holbein's Sir Thomas More, or the huge pearl earring in Vermeer's portrait of the girl, or Chardin's broken loaf. The poet's fascination with light is annotated with his deep awareness of the darkness surrounding it, just like the hollowness surrounding the pilgrims embarking on the journey to legendary Cythera. The poet's search for that stroke of light and the white hound, therefore, is urged by the same feverish passion that sends off the pilgrimage. The chase, no wonder, should fail as it does. The "spectral" hound is but another form of the spectral vision of paradise. Thus the search for the hound has not

brought the poet to artistic perfection, but to the recognition of the impossibility and pointlessness of such an endeavour. The poet's literary aspiration for the canon, therefore, is also unsettled by a similar recognition of the Old Centre in decay—as the passage on *The Fighting Téméraire* suggests: "an empire turning more spectral" (Walcott, *Tiepolo*, 76). This is even further strengthened by the knowledge about Watteau's *Embarkation to Cythera* as the painter's reception piece submitted to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, a crucial step in his canonization. In his own quest for his literary establishment, Walcott sees himself making the same effort as Watteau did, but comes to recognize the impossibility of "spectrally repeating" what was done in the lost Old World. The frustrated search which yields such an understanding, thus brings a deeper self-recognition in *Tiepolo's Hound.*

Giving up the search for the white hound, the poet now searches for himself: "I ravaged a volume on Tiepolo later. / I was searching for myself now, and I found // *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra*, / I was that grey Moor clutching a wolfhound, // tan and excitable the dog frets at her, the Queen gliding in jewels and her train. // Venice is dimming, her diadems in eclipse" (Walcott, *Tiepolo*, 124). The identification with the Moor anticipates the other identification with the African servant in *Apelles Painting Campaspe*. Erikson notes that "[t]he presence of black attendants in Cleopatra's retinue is turned to Walcott's advantage because the transfer of attention from the hound to the Moor redefines the quest and facilitates the shift of focus to Walcott himself". (Erikson, 229).

Following this shift is the discovery of a new vision: "This was something I had not seen before, / since every figure lent the light perfection, // that every hound had its attendant Moor / restraining it with dutiful affection." (Walcott, *Tiepolo*, 124-5) The discovery is the new recognition of the poet himself—not chasing after the hound, but "restraining it". The emphasis is on the ability to master and control. The hound, as well, is no longer the spectral white hound but a "brown hound", echoing another recurring image of the "mongrel" in the poem—the very word Walcott has often used to describe himself and his hybrid identity[43]. The poet's passion for art has not so much diminished, as the Moor restrains the hound "with dutiful affection", but is complemented by a clearer self recognition.

Further, Erikson notes that in *Tiepolo's Hound* "visual images are coordinated and integrated with poetic text to create the volume's overall effect" (Erikson, 225). While the poem travels around, the paintings, all the time, stay at home in the Caribbean—most of the paintings included in the book are about Caribbean scenes, people and landscape. Thus the paintings serve as a constant pole against which the traveller/poet marks his distance from home. And by keeping his relation with paintings, the traveller/poet is able to complete the search by returning home. Erikson has acutely noticed the echoes between the two "portraits" featured in the volume—one of Gauguin, the other of Walcott

[43] Such as in "What the Twilight Says": "mongrel as I am…this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian." (Walcott, *WTS*, 9)

himself[44]; one placed near the very beginning of the volume, the other, near the very end. The two portraits bear great resemblance—both represented as the artist working on a self-portrait, with similar facial expressions and gestures. Walcott's identification with Gauguin is also a recurring one. As in *Midsummer* he writes in the poem "Gauguin / i" of a moment in which he sees through Gauguin's eyes the reflection of merging faces in the mirror:

> I saw in my own cheekbones the mule's head of a Breton,
> the placid, implacable strategy of the Mongol,
> the mustache like the downturned horns of a helmet;
> the chain of my blood pulled me to darker nations,
> through I looked like any other sallow, crumpled colon
> stepping up to the pier that day from the customs launch. (Walcott, *Midsummer*, 29)

Despite the marked resemblance, however, there are also sharp contrast between the two portraits. For example, Gauguin has a halo over his head while Walcott simply wears a baseball cap. The background for Gauguin's portrait is filled with scenes of Caribbean people and landscape. The studio of Gauguin is imagined as full of paintings, tropical fruits and plants. A black women, more over, stands behind Gauguin, placing her hand on his shoulder. The background of Walcott's portrait, in contrast, has nothing but a "start black blank slate suggesting the tabula rasa" (Erikson, 232).

Walcott is here trying to deal with the issue of his hybrid self, an attempt that is enacted throughout the entire volume in various symbolic ways—such as

[44] See Appendix

through the image of the mongrel. The stress, I think, is first of all that of a double allegiance—to both the European tradition and the Caribbean tradition. In the map of cultural geography, the journey to Europe is viewed as moving towards the centre. Yet by constantly interposing images and ideas of home between the breaks of the journey, another cultural-geographical centre is being created—the Caribbean home—which works to balance out the "old" centre and remind the traveller of the journey back home. Thus the poet completes his search circle with homecoming: This is my peace, my salt, exulting acre: / there is no more Exodus, this is my Zion" (Walcott, *Tiepolo*, 162). The reference to Exodus echoes the same reference at the very beginning of the poem, but leads now to "Zion". Thus the journey of the traveller/poet differs finally from the one-way journey of Pissarro, the exile ends in homecoming.

But having two centres logically implies there is no centre at all. More precise and useful than the notion of double allegiance is the understanding of the traveller/poet as occupying a middle ground between the two traditions, from which he equally freely draws. Thus the search for the white hound ends not in a search on the outside, but in a search into oneself. In a way, *Tiepolo's Hound* is also an effort to negotiate Walcott's hybridity and his relationship towards his land and people. By completing the search in the poet's own identity and the recognition of his position towards both the European and Caribbean cultures, his leaving home for Europe, no matter viewed as a betrayal or an exile, ceases to be the gnawing concern, and could thus be understood as in a way

another "homecoming". Thus instead of only embracing the Caribbean, the artist claims two homes—of equal cultural importance to him, in and out of which he freely moves, since both are in his blood. Walcott's life now divided between the Caribbean and America, in a way also testifies to this recognition. His literary career is also built upon such inherent division—and for that matter fusion as well—of European and Caribbean cultures. Just as in his poem "North and South" (1981) he refers to himself—somewhat romanticizing it—as "a colonial upstart at the end of an empire, / a single, homeless, circling satellite" (Walcott, qtd. in Mjöberg). The "upstart" perhaps refers to Greene's famous remark on Shakespeare—while the bard of the Old World lived at the heyday of the empire, inspired by what the Old World offers; the poet of the New World lives and works now at the end of that empire, seeking his literary chances in what its end opens to.

CONCLUSION

Derek Walcott is one of the most important figures in English literature today. An enthusiastic practicing dramatist and a preeminent poet, his works, especially his poetry, demonstrate the writer's remarkable erudition in European art and literary traditions, and pose great intellectual challenges to readers who venture beneath the surface. The densely laid out allusions and references to other works in European art and literary traditions are difficult to work with—or, in other words, they are what one must work through in order to untangle Walcott's heavily mediated poetry. In this study, therefore, trying to be focused instead of exhaustive, I have mainly examined Walcott's literary project with regard to his two major concerns: his duty/responsibility to his the land and people of the Caribbean, as well as his own personal aspiration for his literary establishment. Moreover, I have tried to understand the connections between these two goals of Walcott, and one of the most striking features of his poetry: its frequent engagement with European paintings, painters, and the visual art in general. While in various contexts critics such as Emery, Terada, Cribb, Erikson, or Handley have all examined the close relationship between the visual art and Walcott's poetry, discussions of this subject so far have largely been attending separately to either of Walcott's two goals. Therefore, their readings of Walcott's poems (indeed highly selected lines) in general, illuminating as they are, are not satisfactory since they only shed light on limited and separate aspects of Walcott's works without showing how these aspects are connected and governed

under Walcott's literary project as a whole. Thus with my study I have sought to further this step, by first identifying the connections between Walcott's two major literary goals, and then performing a reading of his poetry as deeply informed by elements of the visual art.

The two major goals of Walcott's literary project, as I have suggested, ultimately stem from the same root: his hybrid identity. His English, Dutch, and African heritages determine that he occupies the position of a fundamental "betweenness". As James Dickey notes, Walcott lives and creates in middle of various force fields:

> Here he is, a 20th-century man, living in the West Indies and in Boston, poised between the blue sea and its real fish...and the rockets and warheads, between a lapsed colonial culture and the industrial North, between Africa and the West, between slavery and intellectualism, between the native Caribbean tongue and English learned from books, between the black and white in his own body, between the sound of the home ocean and the lure of European culture" (Dickey, qtd. in Terada, 1992, 3)

Such "betweenness" necessarily leads to the conflicting pulling from both sides. Walcott's two literary goals based upon such division, understandably then, have been the cause of a series of anxieties. Such fundamental anxieties inform many of Walcott's early poems—most typical of which are "A Far Cry from Africa" and "The Divided Child". His later works, however, informed by a more mature recognition of his hybridity, move towards the direction of reconciliation between these conflicting cultural allegiances and the conflicting literary tasks

they demand. While many Caribbean writers may have been doing very similar things with what Walcott has been doing—tackling issues of their own burden of representation on the own hand, and on the other hand trying to achieve their literary goals, Walcott's uniqueness lies in the strategy he adopts. This strategy 1) is carried out through Walcott's frequent and extensive discussions/meditations on the fundamental issue of representation in his poetry, where his vast knowledge about European art traditions has been his primary and foremost medium; 2) does not seek to eliminate or reconcile the conflicting goals, but contains them and incorporates them into a somewhat unified project. With such a strategy, Thus through the meditations constituted in poetic verbal-visual crossings, Walcott has been able to construct the dialectics of his poetics, which works at once for both of his originally conflicting projects On the one hand, his poetic meditations through paintings provides the theoretical ground for his work against the deep-rooted misrepresentation and misconception of the Caribbean; on the other hand, his negotiation between the individual artist and the entire art tradition, between "imitation" and the fictive "origin", and between the Caribbean and Europe on the whole, has enabled him to both speak for the collective Caribbean experience, and to clear the way for the advancement of his own literary career. As Hogan understands it, Walcott has constructed his literary project as at once a personal and a national project—an "integrated literary practice" through which "he not only elevates himself personally, but shows the possibility of paradigmatic literary achievement for other Afro-Caribbeans."

(Hogan, 164)

However, with the complexity of Walcott's aesthetics, poetics, and politics, his works have provoked various voices of dissent amongst applauses. Gray summarizes the four major criticisms of Walcott's literary project. 1) Walcott's apparent distance from the realities of the Caribbean, combined with his immersion in the European (and therefore the slaver's) traditions have led some critics to question whether his works seek to de- or re-colonizing the Caribbean. 2) Walcott's works frequently employ the universally symbolic instead of the historically concrete, and therefore seem to display the tendency toward the sublime and allegorical. 3) With his tight connection to the European tradition, he is to be suspected of seeing the Caribbean from an imperial outsider's view. 4) The success of Walcott's works could be signals of their appeal to the evaluation criteria understood as calibrated to European and American standards—that of the old centres of power.

Yet if it is still reasonable to criticize Walcott for assuming the role of the spokesman for the Caribbean, the view that Walcott sees the Caribbean through the imperialists' eye is undoubtedly too naïve. As I have been emphasizing throughout my study, strategy has always been the urgent need for Walcott. On the issue of Walcott's complicated relationship with his audience, his primary strategy is to be always keenly aware of his position with regard to his people—demonstrating such awareness through his often self-reflexive poems. Sarah Brouillette has made the insightful observation: "Walcott's

self-consciousness about his authorial position has two major aspects. On the one hand, he is consistently worried about his relationship with the people of the Caribbean. ... On the other hand, he frequently takes up the subject of his earned access to a privileged metropolitan audience, an audience educated in modernist poetics but also interested in the Caribbean as novel literary material." Such self-reflexivity suggests that Walcott has been consciously constructing his own image through his poetry. Following Gray's observation, which I quoted earlier that "Walcott's artistry has long been a subject of Walcott's artistry" (Gray, 125), a further step to go is to point out that "Walcott the poet" has always been the subject of Walcott's poetry. Walcott plays on the basic mode of literary study and appreciation—a natural habit on the part of readers and critics to envision the writer through his/her words. Thus the Walcott in reality constructs his own image—the Walcott in text—as "someone torn between a desire to speak *on behalf* of his poetic subjects and Southern compatriots, and a wish to pursue the interests of his own fame or canonization" (Brouillette, 40). Such an image, as Walcott knows only too well, is what enjoys great popularity among consumers in the literary market. His engagement with painting, painters, and the visual art, then, besides its crucial function as the mediator of his poetic meditation, also provides his poetry the highly usable aesthetic vocabulary through which he speaks, primarily, to the metropolitan consumers.

His "anxiety", then, through his elaborate strategy mediated through visual art, is not only resolved but turned into a useful tool for his literary project.

Although the tensions inherent in the identity as a hybrid Caribbean writer does not completely disappear, Walcott has become highly skillful and strategic in handling these sticky and challenging issues, and is now able to find, above all else, joy in his life and work. As he cheerfully added after answering Simon Stanford's question about the propelling force that moves him to work: "it was exciting to get up to do it—I guess like going to play golf. I don't play golf, but it must have been the same thing!" (Stanford, 28:53) With such capacity to handle all these normally debilitating "divisions", "conflicts", and "anxieties" brought about by his identity, and to transform them into extremely valuable literary resources, Walcott's "creative (strategic) use of his schizophrenia" (Walcott, *WTS*, 16) does help him lift the burden of restrictive notions of cultural identity. In this sense, perhaps, it is reasonable to say that Walcott *does* exhibit that remarkable "intellectual toughness" (Chang, 243).

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APPENDIX

Apelles Painting Campaspe before Alexander (Tiepolo)
URL:
http://www.easypedia.gr/el/images/shared/2/22/Giovanni_Battista_Tiepolo_002.jpg

Girl with a Pearl Earring (Vermeer)
URL:
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/ce/Girl_with_a_Pearl_Earring.jpg

Still Life with Glass Flask and Fruit (Chardin)
URL:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-Baptiste_Sim%C3%A9on_Chardin_029.jpg

Pipes and Drinking Pitcher (Chardin)
URL:
http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/chardin/pipes-pitcher.jpg

The Fighting Téméraire (Turner)
URL:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Turner,_J._M._W._-_The_Fighting_T%C3%A9m%C3%A9raire_tugged_to_her_last_Berth_to_be_broken.jpg

The Feast of Levi (Veronese)
URL:
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f1/Paolo_Veronese_007.jpg

Portrait of Sir Thomas More (Holbein)
URL:
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f0/Hans_Holbein_d._J._065.jpg

Embarkation for Cythera (Watteau)

URL:
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d4/The_Embarktion_for_Cythera.jpg

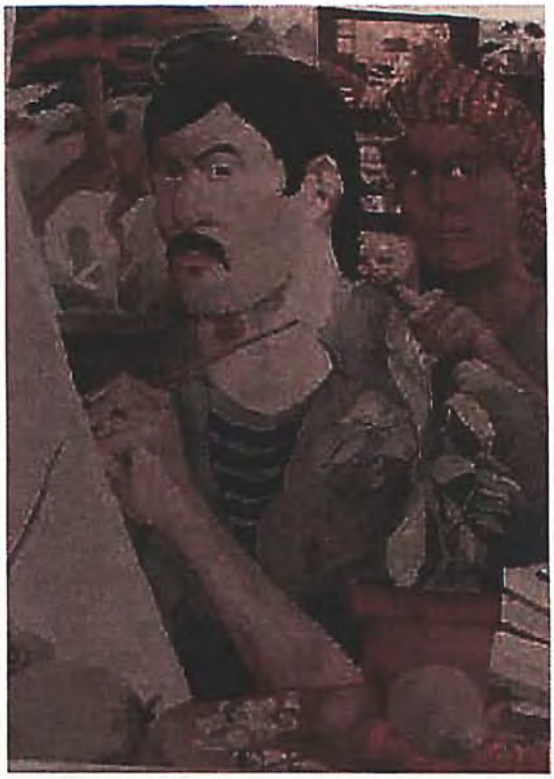
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7f/Antoine_Watteau_-_L%27imbarco_per_Citera.jpg

Walcott's self portrait and portrait of Gauguin:

URL:

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/images/painting.jpg

http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/jvsickle/walcmart.jpg



APPENDIX II

"Part I" of "Sainte Lucie", from *Sea Grapes* (1976)

The Villages

Laborie, Choiseul, Vieuxfort, Dennery,
from these sun-bleached villages
where the church bell caves in the sides
of one grey-scurfed shack that is shuttered
with warped boards, with rust,
with crabs crawling under the house-shadow
where the children played house;
a net rotting among cans, the sea-net
of sunlight trolling the shallows
catching nothing all afternoon,
from these I am growing no nearer
to what secret eluded the children
under the house-shade, in the far bell, the noon's
stunned amethystine sea,
something always being missed
between the floating shadow and the pelican
in the smoke from over the next bay
in that shack on the lip of the sandspit
whatever the seagulls cried out for
through the grey drifting ladders of rain
and the great grey tree of the waterspout,
for which the dolphins kept diving, that
should have rounded the day.

"Part II" of "Sainte Lucie", from *Sea Grapes* (1976) (exerpt)

Evening opens at
a text of fireflies,
in the mountain huts
ti cailles betassion
candles,
candleflies
the black night bending
cups in its hard palms
cool thin water
this is important water
important?
imported?
water is important
also very important
the red rust drum
the evening deep
as coffee
the morning powerful
important coffee
the villages shut
all day in the sun.